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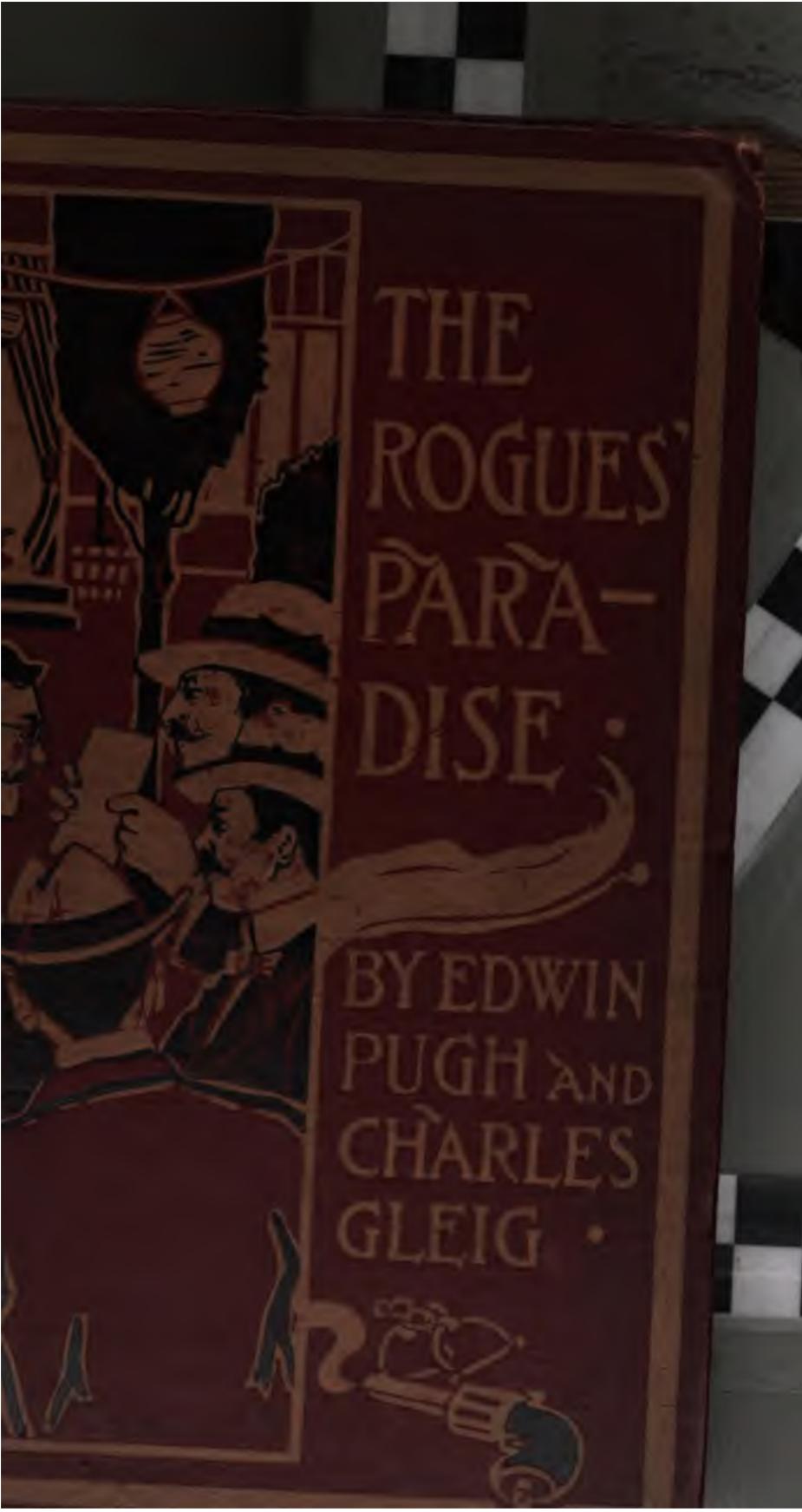
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THE
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PARA-
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BY EDWIN
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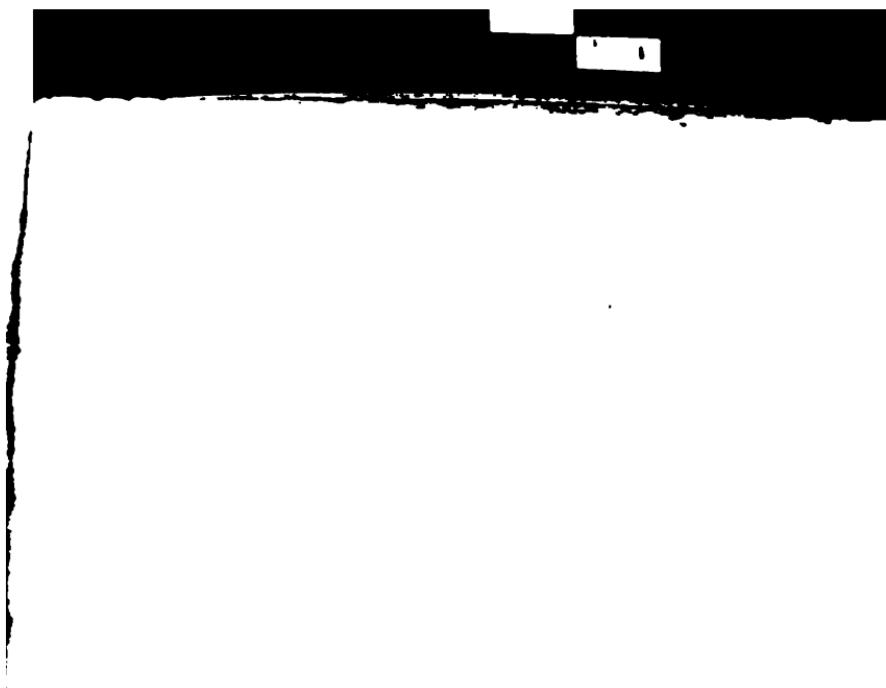


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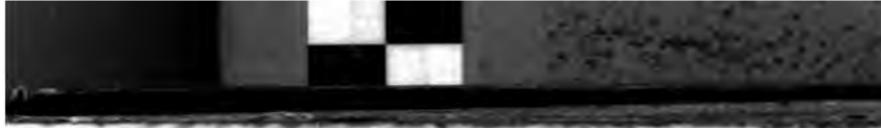






“We’re not here to die.”

The Return of the Living



THE ROGUES' PARADISE.

An Extravaganza.

BY
EDWIN PUGH
(Author of "The Man of Straw," etc.),
AND
CHARLES GLEIG
(Author of "When all Men Starve").

"No legacy is so rich as honesty."—SHAKESPEARE.
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JAMES BOWDEN,
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1898.



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THE ROGUES' PARADISE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL.

BERONA is a toy territory in the far Western Hemisphere. It is a fair realm of feathery foliage and flaming flowers. Bright-hued birds flit among the starry blossoms in the purple shadows of lime and palm, and brilliant creeping things flash like jewels on the broad green leaves of the low-growing tree-ferns or stud the dun earth with flying points of fire. The heavy scent of frangipani and wild stephanotis, blent with a million lesser odours, seems wonderfully attuned to

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the endless, melancholyplash of the sea-waves on the silver sand. There are white roofs among the trees and trim gardens and hedges, for the foot of civilization is heavy on the land, and the aborigines are dispossessed ; such as remain have lost their pride of race, and become as children of Gibeon to the new white conquerors, the insidious British. Many years ago the invasion was begun. Some mutinous seamen were marooned on an island off the Berona coast ; they contrived to cross the water to the mainland, and, fraternizing with the kindly natives, waxed fat on the produce of the country. They died ; but others came in search of health or a climate ; and thus, in the fulness of time, a white colony was founded. To-day, Berona is an appurtenance of the British Empire ; but a few

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 3

years ago it still retained enough of its primitive nature to tempt the adventurous.

At a period two years after the first inland railroad was opened, there stood, on an eminence four miles from the capital, a long, low white house, in which lived an English family. In a room of this house an elderly gentleman, wearing a pith hat, sat reading the newspaper one golden morning. His brow was furrowed with angry lines ; his face was deeply flushed ; his underlip was sucked in, and his upper teeth protruded over it. He was "baa"-ing like an old black ram. He flung down the papers in disgust, and went out in to the garden, where the sunlight dappled the leaves with yellow.

" Bah !" he cried, gazing out across the plain to the misty hills. " What

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do they know about it? A parcel of starving hirelings laying down the law in dirty back rooms! '*We* think' they say, as if what they thought was of the slightest consequence. *We* think, indeed! Bah! What do they know about it?"

He strode about a little, throwing his hands abroad and snorting disdainfully. Presently, he returned to the house, and took up one of the newspapers again. He read aloud the following paragraph, speaking each word slowly as if to convince himself that his senses did not lie:

"'The Minister for Foreign Affairs is stated to have been successful in negotiating for an extension of the Extradition Treaty to Berona. This news will disturb the domestic felicity of at least one gentleman who is reported to be living there. We refer,



THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 5

of course, to the notorious Joshua Sharp, whose connection with the Domestic Unity Mission will be ever fresh in the minds of his many victims.'

"It isn't even grammatical," said the reader tartly. Then the harshness of his face softened, and he murmured, "Aha! a wonderful man, a wonderful man! They may talk as they will, but he's secured his niche in history."

A shadow darkened the floor. A native servant, airily attired, was standing in the open doorway, bowing low. He stood there for a moment, outlined against the green background of shrubbery; then he was thrust aside, and a young man, dark, tall, lissom of limb and handsome of face, stepped into the room.

"Can do, Johnny. Git," he said,

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turning to the black. "How are you, Girdleberry?" he continued, advancing with outstretched hand as the servant vanished. "Sharp in?"

"He'll be in presently."

The young man sat down and wiped his damp brow, pushing back his long, black hair.

"What's he up to?" he asked.

"Mr. Sharp? Oh, when I saw him last, he was sitting in the arbour watching the butterflies."

"And moralizing on the mutability of human affairs, I suppose." He hesitated, fingering his chin. "Er—
young ladies in?"

Mr. Girdleberry did not answer at once. He stooped to collect the newspapers, smiling smugly.

"Young ladies in?" the young man repeated, frowning.

"I think so, Mr. Gwyn."

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 7

There was an interval of silence. Mr. Girdleberry licked his thumb, and scanned each page of the newspaper carefully. The young man watched him curiously.

“Dredging for news, Girdleberry?” he asked. “Murders—suicides—fires—divorces?”

Girdleberry nodded.

“What a fellow you are for primitive sensations!” the young man said. “I find that such things bore me!”

“Ah! what you want is an interest in life.”

Gwyn yawned. “Or a lack of principle,” he said. “No, no; don’t pay me the compliment of a smile,” he added quickly, seeing that Mr. Girdleberry’s mouth was widening. “There is only as much meaning in my words as you can discover—no more—no less!”

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His manner was languid ; he lolled in his chair, gently gasping.

“ It is my soul that hampers me, Girdleberry,” he said suddenly.

“ Your *what*, Mr. Gwyn ? ”

“ My soul ! ”

“ Oh, ah ! Have you lunched ? ”

The young man stared, and answered in a louder tone.

“ It is not my stomach, but my soul that is in revolt.”

Girdleberry sighed, relieved at the intelligence.

“ Oh, is that all ? ” he said. “ I was afraid it might be sunstroke, or —or something serious. . . . Have you seen the papers ? ”

The young man smiled wanly.

“ My dear Girdleberry,” he said indulgently, “ I saw the papers when I was eight years old.”

Girdleberry grunted.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 9

“There’s nothing fresh in them, I suppose, that concerns us?” pursued the young man.

“They want to extend the Extra-dition Treaty to Berona.”

“No, no!” cried the other excitedly. “They never would be guilty of such vandalism, surely. It would kill me. Berona is the only place in the world where one can escape from the blighting influence of the Ten Commandments.”

He groaned.

“I am thinking of our revered friend,” said Girdleberry.

“The ubiquitous Sharp, eh! What will he do? Does he know?”

“He has an inkling,” said Girdleberry.

The young man laughed. He brooded awhile with his head in his hands.

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"There is no rest for the—er—enterprising, Girdleberry," he said, at length. "But to me, it seems, at best, a short-sighted policy on the part of our addle-pated friend."

"Our addle-pated friend?"

"I mean that indefinite quantity known as 'the World.' It seems a short-sighted policy on their part to goad a man of Sharp's—er—*peculiar* abilities into fresh activity."

"If this confounded Act passes he will be forced to seek fresh fields
—"

Girdleberry snorted and resumed his keen perusal of the papers.

There was a flutter and swish of draperies without the door. The young man forgot his languor and sprang up.

The door opened, and two girls entered. They were fair, fresh English

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. II

girls, clad in light muslins and wide-brimmed hats of sunburnt straw.

They smiled, came forward and greeted the young man in a spirit of hearty camaraderie. Girdleberry, gathering up the newspapers in his lean arms in a manner suggestive of a greedy ape, withdrew to the wall, and stood there, watching the young people.

“How are all your folk, Horace?” said the younger girl of the twain.

“Oh, they are coming on, Miss Sharp,” he replied. “I am the shadow they cast before.”

“How is Lady Gwyn?”

“Robust as ever,” he replied.

“And Sir Rowland?”

Horace Gwyn laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“The guv’nor!” he cried. “Oh, he is still girding at an unsatisfactory

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universe. As his convictions grow feebler and feebler he becomes more and more trenchant!"

"Fie, Horace!" said Miss Sharp.

Girdleberry came forward with cocked head.

"I believe," he said, addressing the ladies with clumsy archness, "I believe there are muffins for tea."

"That's a gospel for the guv'nor," cried Horace. "Muffins are the one hard fact of life that he finds no difficulty in digesting."

Girdleberry remarked with a sneer:

"If *I'd* been born with five thousand a year and a landed estate I could have digested anything."

The elder of the girls turned on him angrily.

"Be kind enough to remember that Sir Rowland is a friend of ours," she said.



THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 13

"Of course," he replied suavely and in an undertone. "I know that. But how long do you think his friendship would last, Miss Mabel, if he knew about the D.U.M.?"

"He would probably—and properly—not share your admiration for Mr. Sharp."

Girdleberry showed his teeth.

"That's all very fine," he said. "But who pays your wages?"

The girl flushed.

"Do you think I'd be here if it wasn't for my love for Phœbe?" she said scornfully.

"You can't pay your washing-bills with love, Miss Mabel."

"I tell you I hate it all," she affirmed. "The low trickery—the ineffable, countless meannesses of life here! I would die to get out of it—if it wasn't for Phœbe."

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Girdleberry regarded her keenly.

"Well, well!" he said.

He beckoned Miss Sharp toward him. She was talking to Horace Gwyn and resented the summons with a petulant shake of her shoulders. But Girdleberry beckoned her again, this time a whit imperiously, and she went to him.

"Come outside," he said. "I want to talk to you."

They strolled off among the glowing flowers, amid mighty cacti, purple and yellow convolvuli, eucharis lilies, and bright croton leaves. The cocoanuts waved over them. The ruby and emerald humming-birds flashed across their path; holiday-making lizards, prismatically coloured, slipped away into the rank undergrowth from beneath their feet. Overhead, the sky stretched, densely blue.



THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 15

Horace Gwyn and Mabel watched the pair—the elderly drooping man and the young straight maiden—till they entered a grove of giant limes and were lost. Then Mabel dropped into a low rocking-chair and bent her gaze to the ground gloomily. Horace stood beside her, with his arm perilously near her waist.

"Horace," said Mabel, "if anything mattered I should be very miserable!"

She sighed and plucked at her dainty gown.

"But, of course, nothing does matter," said Horace.

He spoke anxiously, as if doubtful of her fealty to some ideal long set up.

"You say that so often," said Mabel, "that sometimes I think you don't believe it."

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"Belief is easy only to fools."

He waved his arm in gay depreciation of her words. She caught his hand and held it.

"I almost wish we had been born fools, Horace," she said wistfully.

"Mabel!"

She nodded her fair head emphatically.

"I do," she cried. "For then we might enjoy life as so many enjoy it —on the lower plane. Do you know, Horace"—she lowered her voice to a shamed whisper—"I sometimes find myself hankering after the lower plane with its smoking fleshpots."

Horace bent lower and looked into her eyes.

"Would it be wise, do you think," he said earnestly, "to grant a concession to the flesh sometimes?"

Mabel cried out in mock horror.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 17

She rose and confronted him, her form drawn rigidly upright.

“ Horace, you make me shudder,” she said sternly.

“ Mabel.”

She abated somewhat of her severe expression ; her eyes softened.

“ I had an awful dream last night, Horace,” she whispered.

“ What was it ?” he inquired eagerly.

She put her fingers on her lips and looked about cautiously.

“ I dreamed——” she said, and paused, irresolute.

“ Yes, yes,” said Horace.

“ I dreamed that you were kissing me !”

He made a movement toward her. But she checked him.

“ And now,” she said, “ when you talk like that it brings it back—horribly—vividly !”

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She shuddered.

"But, Mabel——" he began.

"It only shows," she said, interrupting him—"it only shows what poor stuff the best of us are made of."

Horace looked at her with pensive eyes.

"I dream of you sometimes," he said softly. His straying fingers touched her hair. Her face lightened. She looked up at him with a bright, eager smile trembling on her lips.

"Oh, do you, Horace?" she cried. He laughed at her quizzically and her face gloomed. "How—how dreadful!" she stammered.

"And the most terrible part of it is I rather like it," he went on.

"What do we do in your dreams?" she asked simply.

"We are quite commonplace," he

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 19

replied. "We—kiss and—and so on. All that sort of thing."

"Do you know, Horace," said Mabel, very gravely, "kissing—as an abstract study—rather attracts me."

"And me," Horace said. "I believe the practice originated in the neolithic age. It had a significance then, perhaps. It has none now."

"No," echoed Mabel, sadly shaking her head; "it has none now."

"It has been vulgarized by centuries of repetition," said Horace.

"They rub noses in the Fiji Islands," said Mabel. "At least, so I have heard. I wonder how the Fijians retain their self-respect."

"Perhaps they don't, you know."

"It is possible."

Mabel reflected awhile, with a finger on her lips.

"The particular method of love-

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making can matter little," she said at length. "The whole thing is so obviously an illusion of the senses."

"The world is peopled with illusions," said Horace. "There is a glamour over all things. Nothing is what it seems, what it pretends to be. Nothing endures—except the unendurable."

"To return to our kisses," murmured Mabel.

"Yes?" cried Horace eagerly.

"They—I mean kisses—might be defined as the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual depravity."

"Or bubbles in the froth on the champagne of love."

"Kisses are a material expression of the immaterial."

She pursed her red lips. Horace covered a smile with his hand.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. 21

“They are rot, of course,” he said, “and should be consigned to the limbo of stale ardours.”

“*Our* love seeks more adequate expression,” said Mabel.

“Seeks and finds,” said Horace.

She gave him an approving smile.

“*Our* love is untrammelled,” she said, beaming. “It is free from the unseemly incidentals of a modern courtship.”

Horace purred applause.

“*We* love on the higher plane,” he said, “where no passion-flowers bloom in the rarefied atmosphere.”

The words rolled forth sonorously. Mabel clasped her hands in an ecstasy of sentimental rapture.

CHAPTER II.

JOSHUA SHARP.

HORACE GWYN was a young man who had done everything—except work ; seen everything—except the joke of his existence ; and been everywhere. He had clamoured at the portals of the House of Joy in all the continents of the world and had invariably found no one at home. He had come to Berona with his father, a Socialistic baronet in quest of an ideal state, and, meeting Mabel West, had taught her his philosophy. She came readily under his sway, for she measured his wisdom with the false gauge of her love and found it wondrous true.

JOSHUA SHARP. 23

They sat together in silent self-absorption—she with her eyes cast down and her hands clasped in her lap; he, beside her, contemplating the beauty of her face in profile—until Phœbe broke in on them boisterously.

“Thank goodness I’ve got rid of that old Gooseberry at last,” she said, flinging down a dainty book upon the table. She glanced at the lovers keenly. “What’s the matter with you two?” she cried. “You haven’t been quarrelling?”

“My dear Phœbe!” protested Mabel.

“You look pretty glum. If ignorance is bliss you ought to be regular Solomons, I should think,” said Phœbe, laughing. She picked up the book which she had flung down. “Come, now, Mr. Curiosity,” she cried, wagging a rosy forefinger at Horace,

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who tried to look bored, but could not refrain from smiling ; "confess you're dying to know what this book is."

"What is it?" asked Mabel.

"It's a book of confessions," said Phœbe. "Papa gave it me. It's ever such a new idea. All your friends write down all their likes and dislikes, and so on."

"I see some one has written *Hic jacet* on the cover," said Horace.

"Yes," said Phœbe proudly, "I made that joke—all by my lone." She opened the book and bade Horace come to the table.

"What for?" he asked.

"You must fill up your page," said Phœbe ; "and then Mabel. Papa's done his already."

"May I look at Mr. Sharp's confession?"

“ Certainly not. What an idea ! ”

She handed him a pen.

“ But I don’t want to confess,” he protested.

“ Write,” she commanded, standing over him inexorably. “ You must. There is no appeal. . . . First, *your favourite name.* ”

“ My favourite name ! ” he echoed.

Mabel laughed softly.

“ Mabel, of course,” said Phœbe.

“ I don’t like the obviousness of Mabel,” pleaded Horace, but he wrote it down.

“ Now, *your favourite author,* ” said Phœbe.

“ Oh, Nuttall ! ”

He spoke with a great air of finality.

“ Who’s Nuttall ? I never heard of him,” cried Phœbe. “ Is he a poet or what ? ”

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“ He is a humorist and wit,” said Horace. “ I love him because he never argues and always tells the scathing truth.”

“ What has he written ? ”

“ My dear Miss Sharp, I cannot credit that you are genuinely ignorant of Nuttall’s great work.”

“ I’ve never heard of any book connected with the name of Nuttall except Nuttall’s Dictionary.”

“ He has written nothing else.”

Phœbe laughed indulgently.

“ Oh, go your own mad way,” she said. “ Now, *your favourite musician*.”

“ My favourite musician is King David,” said Horace.

“ Why King David ? ”

“ Because he is dead and has left no scores.” He wrote that down.

“ And *my favourite character in history*,” he said, “ is King Saul,

JOSHUA SHARP. 27

because he did his best to suppress David."

"Oh!" cried Phoebe, "isn't that rather wicked?"

"Oh no, merely funny, I assure you."

"It would be funny if it were not wicked, coming, as it does, from you. I don't think I shall let you write any more. I shall tear out your page."

She shut up the book, pouting.

"Here comes Mr. Sharp," said Mabel suddenly.

A slight, middle-aged gentleman entered the room. His figure was straight ; his mien, brisk ; his manner, keen and alert. He had a fresh complexion ; his hair was crisp and white ; he had a short beard, neatly trimmed.

"Aha!" he cried, smiling genially.

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“Gathering rosebuds whilst ye may, I see. I have been similarly engaged.”

His voice was high-toned and thin, but pleasant to hear.

His daughter Phœbe pounced upon him with an affectation of great sternness and seized the lapels of his coat in her hands.

“Where have you been all the morning, papa?” she cried. “I have been so nervous about you in this heat.”

“My love,” said he playfully, “I have been drinking in the beauties of nature, revelling in the song of gentle dicky-birds, and laying up fresh stores of vitality against the deadening influence of the commercial world.” He turned to Horace Gwyn. “Ah, that commercial world, Mr. Horace!” he said, “where the only

JOSHUA SHARP. 29

current coin is dross and virtue has no marketable value."

"I object to virtue," said Horace, "or what the world calls *virtue*. I find it bores me. It is so noisy and so dull."

Joshua Sharp smiled indulgently upon the young man, but did not reply. Phœbe went to her father and rested her cheek against his sleeve. In all that she did there was a pretty affectation of childishness.

"Dear papa," she said, looking up at him, "I'm so glad you haven't to trouble your head with those horrid business cares now. Thank Heaven we are far away from the City here."

"Yes, yes," said Sharp, patting her cheek, "this seclusion is very grateful to my feelings after the fevered rush and whirl of a business life, and I hope I appreciate thoroughly the

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manifold chances it affords me of observing Nature at first-hand and improving my mind with meditation. Yet, sometimes, I confess, I sorely miss that blessed consciousness of public utility which attached to me when I was connected with the D.U.M."

Horace stirred lazily in his canvas chair and turned his face to the old gentleman.

"Forgive my frightful ignorance, Mr. Sharp," he said; "but I never know anything that everybody else knows. Common knowledge has absolutely no charm for me. What is the D.U.M?"

Joshua Sharp smiled and hesitated a moment before replying.

"The D.U.M.," he said, at length, "was the Domestic Unity Mission, of which I had the honour

to be Secretary and Treasurer for many useful years. I am not perfect——”

Horace and Mabel cried out protestingly :

“ Oh, Mr. Sharp ! ”

“ No,” he repeated with emphasis, “ I am *not* perfect. Still, in justice to myself I am bound to confess that in that capacity I feel I was humbly instrumental in doing not a little good in this sad, suffering world. The welfare of the world has ever been my care. I feel toward the world as a father must feel toward a big, stupid son.”

‘ Sometimes it is done with a strap,’ said Horace vaguely.

You may laugh, Mr. Horace,” said Joshua Sharp, rather sadly ; “ yet it seems to me the charity that embraces the world is a very beautiful

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thing—" he paused—" but the charity that stops at home is the better bestowed," he added slyly.

Mr. Girdleberry re-entered the room, still carrying a mass of newspapers in his arms. He halted doubtfully at the door until Joshua Sharp drew near him, when he whispered in his ear :

" Sir ! "

Sharp turned with an anxious face, unpleasantly impressed by Girdleberry's tone.

" What is it ? " he asked.

Mr. Girdleberry lowered his voice and replied :

" I want to speak to you before any more visitors come."

" Yes, yes," said Sharp. He turned to the young people. " Now, children, run away and play in the garden for awhile," he said. " Phœbe,

JOSHUA SHARP. 33

don't forget to feed your doves. Doves are so pastoral—eh, Girdleberry?"

Girdleberry rubbed his shrivelled hands and smirked wryly.

"Ah, you have such a pretty fancy, Mr. Sharp," he said, "such a lively imagination. *I* have nothing of that, you know, nothing at all. I am literal and prosaic to the core. I have never regarded doves in a pastoral light."

Horace and Mabel and Phœbe trooped out into the garden, leaving the two old gentlemen alone together. At once their demeanour changed; all gaiety of expression fled from their faces; they gazed haggardly into each other's eyes.

"Well, what is it, Girdleberry?" asked Joshua Sharp.

Girdleberry peered cautiously about

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the room and coughed behind his hand twice or thrice. Then he threw down the papers on the table, and, selecting one from the heap, put a finger on a paragraph and said, "Read that."

Joshua Sharp read with eager eyes and tightening lips. When he had done he looked up and regarded Girdleberry very intently.

"Well, sir, what do you think of it?" asked Girdleberry.

Sharp paced the length of the room two or three times with his eyes bent on the floor. At last he stopped and laughed and snapped his fingers.

"Pooh! pooh!" he said. "Berona is safe enough for the present."

"But safer for the absent," muttered Girdleberry.

"Eh? Ha, ha! Not bad. . . .

No, no, Girdleberry, there's no occasion for alarm yet. Let these journalistic geese flourish their quills and cackle as long as they like. *That* won't set the law in motion."

"But there may be something in it," urged Girdleberry.

Joshua Sharp fingered his chin doubtfully, but in an instant his face brightened again.

"Anyway, I shall have ample warning," he said. "A word, and I'm prepared to flit at an hour's notice—like the swallows when they scent the first cold breath of winter."

"Ah, sir, what a way you have of putting things," said Girdleberry. "I verily believe if you hadn't been a great financier you'd have been a greater poet."

Joshua Sharp laughed.

"Thank you, Girdleberry," he said,

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"you've always appreciated me, I know."

"I don't think you can very justly complain of a lack of appreciation," said Girdleberry, in mildly reproachful accents. "You have generally contrived to gain the good opinion of the world, sir——"

"By the simple expedient of not deserving it."

Girdleberry chuckled. His manner thawed under the warming influence of Joshua Sharp's affability.

"I shall never forget that day when you addressed the subscribers to the D.U.M. at the first half-yearly meeting," he said. "Lord, how you moved 'em! How the women cried!"

"And some of them are crying yet," said Joshua Sharp.

There was an interval of silence.

Girdleberry shook his head and observed, with some show of emotion :

“ It was a beautiful scheme.”

Sharp dug his factotum in the ribs and laughed slyly.

Girdleberry joined in his mirth, but less heartily, as if his sense of humour were half drowned in a sea of admiration.

“ It was a masterly notion,” he affirmed.

“ Yes, it was masterly,” said Joshua Sharp. “ I feel that myself. . . . To place domestic felicity upon the market at £1 per share, fully paid up.”

“ It was grand ! ” said Girdleberry. “ Magnificent ! ”

“ Grand in its simplicity ; magnificent in its results—for me.”

Girdleberry sighed.

“ When I think of your brilliant

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past," he said, "it makes my heart ache to see you rusting here."

"Wasting my 'cuteness on the desert air,' eh?" cried Joshua Sharp, laughing. Then his tone saddened; he seemed to be infected with Girdleberry's gloomy mood—but only for a moment. His face cleared and he cried: "Never mind. Let us wait. I'm afraid domestic unity is played out, but there are other things—other things."

"You are a great man, sir," said Girdleberry.

"And, like all great men, lonely in my greatness," said Sharp. He spoke mournfully, but with a roguish twinkle in his eye. Indeed, throughout the whole conversation he opposed an attitude of thin drollery to the other's severe earnestness.

"If only your daughter knew——"

began Girdleberry, speaking slowly. But Joshua Sharp checked him.

"No, no," he said earnestly, his face flushing; "my daughter is saturated with the old-fashioned prejudices in favour of dull honesty. I would not have it otherwise. It is better that she should remain ignorant of my commercial triumphs. She has no suspicions, I think?"

"No," answered Girdleberry, shaking his head, "she still thinks you are here because you are an invalid."

"This rôle of the invalid is becoming very irksome to me," said Sharp irritably. "I feel so aggressively healthy. I am always wanting to dance and sing or do something extravagant. Yesterday, after dinner, my mind went back to the days of my irresponsible boyhood and a great

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yearning to play leapfrog came over me. For two solid hours I wrestled with the inclination to go out into the square, where the iron posts are. I had to go to bed at last to escape the temptation. As soon as I fell asleep I dreamed of 'Horny Winkles' horses.' He laughed. "There's nobody about," he said. "Give me a back, Girdleberry."

Girdleberry laughed sympathetically, and bent down with his hands on his knees, as requested.

Joshua Sharp cried out, "Tuck in your tuppeny," spat on his hands, crouched, took a little run and vaulted lightly over the other's back.

"I feel fourteen to-day," he said, as he alighted.

Phœbe glanced in at the door and cried out in horrified tones :

"Papa, papa, what can you be

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thinking of? with your weak heart too!"

Joshua Sharp paused shamefacedly in the act of taking another little run toward Girdleberry; he had not seen his daughter.

"My dear," he observed with perfect gravity, "I was just giving Mr. Girdleberry a practical illustration of a little theory of mine in therapeutics." He turned to Girdleberry, who had risen in hasty confusion from his crouching attitude, and held out his hand toward him. Girdleberry shook it warmly, but Sharp frowned to him to desist, remarking: "See! temperature absolutely normal!"

Girdleberry, driven to the last extremity of bewildered shame, drew out his watch and murmured vaguely, as he pressed Sharp's wrist:

"Ninety degrees in the shade!"

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Phœbe looked on wonderingly, made doubtful of her first conviction that the whole affair was wild farce by the solemn deportment of the two elderly gentlemen. She retired, with her hand to her forehead, protesting feebly against any repetition of such perilously gymnastic experiments.

“But I must be serious,” said Sharp, when she had gone. He sat down in a low wickerwork chair and stretched out his legs luxuriously. “After all, Girdleberry, this development of events is somewhat grave. We mustn’t run any risks of being extradited, even to gratify that craving for sensation so rampant among the English people. My ambition doesn’t soar to six headlines all to myself.”

Girdleberry moved restlessly across the room, frowning and biting his nails.

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“Miss West,” he said significantly, and paused, irresolute.

“Eh?” cried Sharp. “What about her?”

“I don’t think she is very friendly to our enterprise,” said Girdleberry. “It’s seems to me——”

“Miss West is a very charming girl, Girdleberry,” said Joshua Sharp. “I cannot dislike her, be she never so unfriendly. She will do me no harm ; because, fortunately, she is so greatly attached to Phœbe. For a spirit of his notoriously evil reputation it seems to me that the Devil is curiously—almost pedantically—conscientious. He works very hard for his own—and women are his favourite instruments.”

“I think we ought to be ready to be off quick if necessary,” said Girdleberry.

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"Yes, yes," said Sharp, speaking as if wearied by the other's insistence. "By the way, there may be a letter for me to-day from some of our friends in Town. I have known the post to come in on Thursdays."

"Shall I go down to the grocer's and see?" asked Girdleberry.

"Perhaps you'd better—if you will be so good," said Sharp.

Mr. Girdleberry nodded and went out, leaving Joshua Sharp to mix himself a brandy peg.

And whilst he mixes and sips we will sketch his history, which is the history of the D.U.M.

CHAPTER III.

THE D.U.M.

THE thriving town of Pullborough, which has stood for some two centuries in the clay-soiled valley of the Thames, will be remembered in English history as the birthplace of the ginger-bread nut and of Joshua Sharp.

The father of Joshua Sharp was a contemporary of Sir Peter Porter, the illustrious inventor of the ginger-bread nut. Old Sharp was a retail grocer in his native town, and an unsuccessful one at that. He was pious and unfortunate. In vain he sanded the sugar and mingled chicory with the best pure coffee. Even

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regular attendance at church failed to bring custom. The grocery business did not flourish.

Indirectly, however, old Sharp's piety was of service to him. His son Joshua received a semi-religious, semi-commercial education at the Church School.

A great deal of nonsense has been written concerning the boyhood of great men. The average schoolboy abhors originality, and little Joshua was clever enough to conceal all manifestations of his dawning genius. He won but few prizes and not a little popularity. A less clever lad than Joshua would have made enemies: he made none.

At the age of twelve years two subjects specially attracted him: arithmetic and Scripture history. He was wonderfully quick at figures and

had also a retentive memory. The vagaries of the Kings of Israel amused him. He could repeat the commandments backwards. On one occasion he distinguished himself by correcting the Biblical quotation of a Nonconformist speaker, and old Sharp was so delighted that he gave the boy half a crown. That night Joshua read his Bible with doubled interest. "There is money in this," he reflected. And little Joshua was right. Biblical knowledge has been a commercial lever in England for centuries; and if combined with talent for arithmetic it may develop into a great power. At the age of fourteen Joshua Sharp stumbled vaguely upon this discovery and pondered it in his heart. At twenty he was still digesting it.

Joshua passed in due course from

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the Church School to the Grammar School, remaining at the latter until the age of sixteen. To the Classics he turned a deaf ear. He felt instinctively that Virgil and Homer were played out, and that a study of Cæsar's campaigns could profit him little.

Sharp senior was anxious to put his brilliant son into the Church—by some back door. But Joshua's ambitions were worldly. "It's no use, dad," he said. "The Church is no calling for me. I want to make money. And," he would add firmly, "I'll do it too, as sure as your best fresh is—well, you know what."

"Bless the lad!" returned old Sharp admiringly, "I do believe you will."

"If I had a thousand pounds, dad, I'd make things hum."

But the difficulties in the way of a good start in life deterred Joshua seriously. How could he get a thousand pounds? He was appalled at the prospect of having to sell his brain and body to some fat, prosperous employer of ill-paid labour. He reviewed his father's retail struggles with dismay. Sharp senior had not been hampered by conspicuous honesty, yet he had failed. How, then, were fortunes made? Was it honesty that did it, or sheer luck?

“ ‘ No legacy is so rich as honesty,’ ” he murmured doubtfully. Then he smiled as he recalled another quotation from the immortal bard : “ ‘ Honesty’s a fool and loses that it works for,’ ” he muttered cynically.

At seventeen Joshua Sharp had to choose a career. His parents still

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urged him to enter the Church. Old Sharp argued, Mrs. Sharp wept ; but Joshua was firm. His ambition, he said, was to save money, not souls. He set out for London with £5 in his pocket.

For nearly five years his parents heard nothing of him. He tried many occupations, drifted aimlessly, as it seemed, from one ill-paid clerkship to another. Soon he ceased to write home. His parents spoke of him as "a lost vessel." Meanwhile, Joshua was sharpening his wits upon the grindstone of humanity. He made only a bare living, but he gained experience, and knowledge of men. Also he made a study of women.

At two-and-twenty, Joshua returned to Pullborough with money in his pockets and fine raiment upon his

back. There was great rejoicing in the back parlour behind the shop.

"Well, my boy," said old Sharp, after supper had been cleared, "and so you've made money?"

Joshua sipped his gin and water and smiled.

"I have made a start," he said.

"Ah! I knew you'd succeed," said old Sharp. "Didn't I tell you ma?"

And then Joshua told such of his adventures as were fit for publication. He had plenty of imagination, and his parents believed all that he told them.

He returned to London after a few days, and for another five years rarely visited his home. It was understood that he was prospering; but Joshua was sadly hampered by lack of capital. His eager ambition wearied and

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sickened under the restrictions of the Commercial Code. Meanwhile, he had not neglected his Biblical studies. He made friends in serious circles, and became famous as a speaker at Exeter Hall. He had a trick of flavouring his speeches with the rare salt of religious humour. Joshua never made the mistake of taking himself seriously—he left that to his pious friends. About this time he became Secretary to the Society supplying Trousers to the Natives of West Africa, with a salary of £300 a year. It was at this epoch of his singular career that he turned his back upon secular affairs, and began to plan the serious work of his life.

Simultaneously he fell in love.

The lady of his choice was the daughter of a rich tradesman of Pullborough, who had twice been

Mayor. Joshua laid hot siege to the heart of Miss Susan Flemming, and carried that pure citadel by storm. She heard him speak upon the work of the Society and was deeply moved.

The brilliant young Secretary was eloquent on the breechless sorrows of the negro. He depicted his sufferings with all the delicacy of a refined humorist. Not even an American lady need have blushed, so delicate was Joshua. His courtship flowed peacefully to the altar rails. Miss Flemming, plus five thousand pounds, became the property of Joshua Sharp.

For a few years he retained his Secretaryship to the Society, and advanced in the confidence of the Directors. Joshua was a keen man of business, and profited more than the negroes by the manufacture of the trousers.

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In domestic, as in public life, Mr. Sharp was pointed to as a model of prosperity. He treated his wife with unvarying kindness and was tenderly repaid. Mrs. Sharp revered him above all living men, and she knew very few dead ones. She laughed at all his jokes, and understood few of them ; she sang his praises at many pious tea parties. Joshua's reputation for piety and commercial sagacity was consolidated ; his speeches at Exeter Hall were printed *verbatim* in the *Pullborough Weezer*. He was elected a member of the Town Council, and people predicted that he would become Mayor. Joshua heard the reports and smiled ; but sometimes he would pause beneath the inartistic statue of Sir Peter Porter, and murmur to himself : " Why not ? "

The late Sir Peter, of ginger-bread

nut fame, was represented leaning upon an umbrella, with the tall hat of respectability upon his long, narrow head. Joshua sometimes fancied that the grim features of the statue relaxed into a cunning leer as he looked up at him. "Were you a rogue too, old boy?" he muttered; "and did you know it yourself?"

There was no hypocrisy about Joshua—out of business hours. For honesty he entertained profound contempt. He gloried in his bogus reputation for piety.

Joshua Sharp had prospered, but he was not content. Like all great men, he gauged his capacity for high achievement. He regarded his secretaryship and his reputation for piety as mere stepping-stones to fortune. The turning point in his career—the point at which he finally renounced

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honesty—was the death of his wife. The good woman had been a drag upon his illegitimate ambitions, for Joshua had prized her respect.

She died with loving words upon her pallid lips, commanding their only child Phœbe to his fatherly care.

Mr. Sharp now riveted his genius upon a scheme which had long lain dormant in his busy brain. He soon planned in outline all the details of the great speculation with which his name is inseparably connected. This project was the flotation of the Domestic Unity Mission.

His first step was to secure the co-operation of his father-in-law, and, thanks to the financial support of the ex-Mayor and his friends, the Company was floated successfully.

At the first Meeting of the Share-holders (held in the Pullborough

Town Hall) Joshua Sharp was elected Secretary and Treasurer. The Earl of Belkshire, a nobleman of serious views, accepted the Chairmanship; and more than one Bishop figured in the list of Directors. The local enthusiasm was quite remarkable; the Pulborough papers vied with one another in puffing the Domestic Unity Mission, with its capital of £100,000 in £1 shares, fully paid up. Mr. Sharp had "squared" the editors. Throughout his financial career he had the support of the Press.

Thus the D.U.M. sprang into being, and no more skilful nurse than Mr. Sharp could have been engaged to tend the babe in its early struggles. Like other infants, it passed through childish ailments, but, at the end of the second year, its

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vitality was assured. In a few years the D.U.M. developed into a great commercial success. The distinguished Directors did not underrate the genius of Mr. Sharp, and, as years rolled on, they became cyphers. Sharp dominated the vast concern ; the three Managing Directors—a Bishop, a banker, and a brewer—became his puppets, meekly appending their signatures to everything they were asked to sign.

In the tenth year of his stewardship Mr. Sharp received a signal proof of the value set upon his services. The good people of Pullborough had invested largely in D.U.M. stock, and the original £1 shares were now worth £30. So they resolved to give Mr. Sharp a public banquet, to be followed by speeches in the Town Hall, and the presentation of

an illuminated address on vellum. There are limits even to the gratitude of the successful investor. An address on vellum is not very costly.

Glowing with pride and good wine, Joshua received the illuminated address with his usual cheerful modesty. He was not forty-five and still in vigorous health ; his digestion was sound, his face beamed with benevolence and health. The applause died away at last. Aged townsmen said they had witnessed no such demonstration of public feeling since the memorable occasion when Sir Peter Porter presented the biscuit to William IV.

Mr. Sharp rose to his feet, wiped a tear from his eye, and waited for silence. He got it. Every ear was strained to catch the pearls of his wisdom. They thought he would

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teach them how to make more money.

Mr. Sharp began by asserting that he was deeply moved by the address on vellum. He spoke of it as a "priceless gift," and was apparently so overpowered by emotion that no one suspected him of sarcasm. He alluded to his own unworthiness with becoming modesty. "You ain't unworthy," yelled the audience. But Mr. Sharp was curiously insistent.

"Have it as you will, dear friends," he said; "but remember that I confessed myself unworthy of the great honour which you," etc., etc.

"I trust," he continued, "that I may be able to retain your flattering confidence until these brilliant letters of red and gold have lost their ruddy splendour."

He began to trace the history of

the D.U.M. and dwelt with natural pride upon the great rise in the value of the shares. Suddenly he broke away from commercial details, and spoke as follows :

“ Gentlemen, I know that you are more deeply interested in the moral influence of the D.U.M. than in the pecuniary success with which Providence has crowned our efforts. Ladies —dear ladies—it is to the tenderness of your kind hearts that our success has been chiefly due. What nobler, what purer aim could we have than the spread of Domestic Unity in our dear English homes? Yes, ladies, it is because our aim has been domestic and moral that pecuniary success has followed. So, dear friends, let us push forward in the good work ; let us advertize ; let us find recruits ; let us extend our wide sphere of

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influence throughout the British Isles. Let us," he concluded, "invest freely in the forthcoming issue of fresh shares, to which I have alluded to-night."

A week later the new issue of shares was announced. The D.U.M. reached the zenith of its prosperity, and in the noontide of its fortunes Joshua Sharp ruled supreme. And for some years longer all went well. The accounts and reports were falsified so skilfully that no one suspected the deep game which was being played by the respected Secretary and Treasurer. Even Phœbe Sharp believed her father to be the soul of honour. But Mr. Sharp knew that the end was near. For years he had been preparing for flight, planning his *grand coup*. The collapse came suddenly, but Sharp was ready.

One bitterly cold day in July he came home early in the afternoon and told Phoebe that he had been ordered to take a complete rest and a long sea voyage. He told her that his heart was affected.

Phoebe threw her arms about his neck and burst into tears.

"Let us go away at once," she sobbed.

"There, there, my child, do not agitate yourself," said Mr. Sharp. "We will start the day after to-morrow."

Phoebe was rather staggered, but fearing he might alter his mind, promised to be ready.

Mr. Sharp bade her tell nobody of their plans, explaining that the news of his illness might cause the shares to fall. Even the servants were kept in ignorance.

In this wise, Joshua Sharp and his

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daughter, accompanied by Phœbe's companion, Mabel West, and by Mr. Girdleberry (Sharp's secretary), slipped away quietly to Liverpool, and put to sea in a barque specially chartered by the astute Sharp. They had an uneventful voyage to Longbuoy, the seaport of Berona, and there disembarked, safe and sound, some ten weeks after leaving Liverpool. *The ship did not touch at any port* between Liverpool and Longbuoy. Mr. Sharp's health had improved, he said, but he wished to remain for a while in the beautiful climate of Berona. They travelled up country, and settled down near the sleepy, tropical town to which Joshua Sharp had forwarded his earnings. Beneath the shady palms of his garden Sharp once more breathed freely. The crisis had been safely passed.

Meanwhile, the D.U.M. tottered to its fall. A howl of rage and grief went up one morning before the closed shutters of the London office. The bad news travelled with lightning speed to the four corners of the kingdom. Joshua Sharp could not hear the angry roar; but he sniffed its echo in the English papers, and smiled.

“Girdleberry,” he said mildly, as he indicated a ferocious article in the *Pullborough Weezer*, “that editor has no sense of gratitude. If the ass had sold out six months ago, he would have cleared a thousand pounds.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROGUES IN COUNCIL.

THE dusky servant, his bared teeth gleaming, appeared in the doorway, ushering in a gentleman of lean outline and a lady. The gentleman was one Major Corso, a resident of Berona and friend of Joshua Sharp. He had a purple face and bulbous features; his hair was thin, but he made the most of it; he wore a heavy moustache, and walked with a military stiffness born of gout. The lady was plump and dimpled, quick of speech, arch, playful. She was a little too conscious of her pretty profile, but altogether charming and quite irresistible.

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Joshua Sharp greeted his guests effusively.

"Mix yourself a peg, Major," he said. "Baroness, pray take off your hat."

"Oh no, Mr. Sharp, I couldn't really," she said, looking slightly shocked. But then, she always looked slightly shocked.

"I'm so sorry the girls are not here," said Joshua Sharp. "But they went out into the garden a little while ago, and I suppose they have met a serpent and are eating apples."

"I saw the serpent's hat over the top of the bushes—a grey felt with a six-inch brim," said Major Corso.

"How is dear Phœbe?" asked the Baroness.

"Well and happy. . . . Ah, here she comes!"

But it was not Phœbe whom the

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servant ushered in. It was a little bearded man with a shining face and loose set eyes. He was very stout of figure and slow of movement.

"Mr. Bound, by all that's opportune!" cried Joshua Sharp. "Sit down, Mr. Bound. Have something to drink?"

"Thank you," said Bound. "I will have a little water."

"A little water!" cried the Major, aghast.

"I will have a little water," repeated Bound solemnly, "in half a glassful of brandy."

The Baroness and Major Corso laughed tumultuously. Joshua Sharp smiled faintly as one capable of saying a better thing in better fashion.

"As I was coming down here," said Bound, sipping his brandy, "an idea struck me."

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“Did it hurt you?” asked the Major facetiously.

“Yes, it did, sir,” said Bound. “It was looking the other way and put its elbow in my ribs.”

“What did you do?” asked the Baroness.

“I hit it across the shins with my stick. It was a fine idea, but it howled like the deuce.”

“I don’t know what on earth you are talking about,” cried Major Corso.

“Pray explain, Mr. Bound,” said Joshua Sharp.

Bound laughed.

“It was one of your baked natives that ran into me,” he said. “And that’s my idea—at least, it is my raw material. Here are five-and-forty thousand heathens living in sin, and not a hand stretched

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out to help them. Here they are living uncared for, uncherished. My heart bleeds for them. But blood is useless without funds. Let us found something of a civilizing tendency.

Joshua Sharp cried out enthusiastically :

“ Your hand, Mr. Bound. You are a man of resource, sir. I have never given the matter a thought before, but now I see its possibilities plainly.

“ We must have a specific object,” said Major Corso. “ We must know definitely what it is we are going to do for them. How about a dress reform society ? ”

“ I don’t see the pathetic possibilities of clothes in a climate like this,” said the Baroness. “ In London it is all very well to talk of shivering outcasts

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on wet doorsteps. Here, it wouldn't do at all. Everybody would be consumed with envy."

"No, clothes won't do," said Bound.

"How about divorce?" cried Sharp.
"Divorce?"

"Yes, don't you see the possibilities? Free Divorce for all! No more knockings on the head and inland flights; no more dreary straining of the marriage bonds."

"But are there any marriage bonds?" faltered the Baroness.

"They chew dirt or something," said Joshua Sharp. "But we will alter all that. We will see that they are married properly in future. No wedding ring—no *decree nisi*. That shall be our motto. I will marry them myself, if necessary. And we can run a branch society for the

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importation and sale of brass wedding-rings."

"Brass is *the* metal for wedding-rings, certainly," said Major Corso.

"We might call ourselves the Brazen Cheek Divorce Society," suggested Mr. Bound, chuckling.

"The first thing to be done is to form a committee to receive subscriptions," said Joshua Sharp.

"I am willing to act as Treasurer *pro tem*," said Major Corso. "All cheques to be made payable to Andrew Corso and crossed 'London & Universal Banking Company.' "

"Don't you think," asked the Baroness, "that it would be better to have me for Treasurer? It would inspire confidence, and it would be a novelty."

"The confidence?"

"No. I mean that there are so

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few lady Treasurers. It would be such an attractive idea—striking, you know. Men will trust a woman."

"Oh, I don't think that would do at all," said Mr. Bound earnestly. "People would never take us seriously. They would fancy we were rather amateurs, don't you know. Obviously, I am the person to be Treasurer. Everybody knows me."

"Don't you think, Mr. Bound, that you are rather *too* well known?" said the Baroness, with an acid smile. "There was that little affair, you know—eh?"

Mr. Bound drew himself up stiffly.

"Madam," he said, "my character may be slightly soiled. I don't deny that it is. But I would remark that some characters are too dark to show a stain."

"All this is idle," cried Joshua

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Sharp. "How can any one nominate *himself* for such an important office as Treasurer? You have all put yourselves out of court. It only remains for me to take the reins of office."

He smiled very sweetly on the company.

"Considering that it was my idea," began Mr. Bound.

"We are not considering that at all," said Joshua Sharp. "We are considering the appointment of a Treasurer. But, since you are willing to assume responsibility for the idea, let me point out how very unbecoming it would be in us—the mere suckers of your brain—to impose upon you the arduous post of Treasurer to which no salary attaches. We appreciate your zeal, but our gratitude deters us from taking undue advantage of it."

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“Oh, damn all that, you know!” shouted Mr. Bound.

“I am determined to be Treasurer myself or go out of the affair altogether,” said Joshua Sharp firmly.

“That’s rather nasty of you, Mr. Sharp,” said the Baroness. “And I am surprised at your allowing a mere feeling of pique to overcome your sense of what is meet and fitting.”

Major Corso and Mr. Bound had conferred aside for a moment.

“After all,” said the Major cordially, “I think Mr. Sharp had better be Treasurer.”

“I don’t agree with you,” said the Baroness.

“Let us put it to the vote. Mr. Bound is with me, I know. Mr. Sharp cannot be counted. Therefore the proposition is carried by a majority of one.”

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The Baroness fumed a little, grew very red, and laughed.

"All right," she said at last, very sullenly.

"I must have it down in writing," said Joshua Sharp, "or where's my authority?"

"Oh, we cannot sign anything," said Mr. Bound firmly.

"Certainly not," said the Major and the Baroness.

"Then I beg to tender my resignation," said Joshua Sharp. "If you accept it I shall start a rival society."

"Oh, come, Sharp, do be reasonable," cried Mr. Bound.

"Could I be more sweetly so?" asked Sharp. He went to a little writing-table at the farther end of the room and scribbled industriously for a minute or two. Then he returned and laid what he had written

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before them. "Come, sign it," he said. "You must. You know the alternative."

Mr. Bound read the document aloud :

"We hereby nominate Mr. Joshua Sharp to the office of Secretary and Treasurer (*pro tem*) to the Society for the Promotion of Divorce in Berona, and we also desire to express our entire reliance on his good faith and probity."

"It's too much," said the Baroness.

"Mind, Sharp, if I sign it I sign it under protest," said Mr. Bound severely.

"So long as you do sign it I don't care," said Joshua Sharp sweetly, "though I deprecate your sentiments."

They all signed it, grumbling and grunting splenetically.

"And now," said Joshua Sharp,

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as he pocketed the document, having first examined each signature carefully, "I desire to express the intense feeling of gratification this touching proof of your confidence has given me. I hope, lady and gentlemen, you will never have cause to regret your flattering trust in me, and I will always do my best to merit your continued good opinion."

He bowed, waved his hand with airy grace, and sat down.

There was no time for further talk, for at that moment Horace Gwyn and the two girls returned from the garden. They were severally introduced to the visitors, who expressed themselves charmed, and the conversation descended to the commonplace.

The Baroness engaged Horace Gwyn in an animated discussion on

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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the futility of human effort. Major Corso exchanged badinage of a solid, military sort with Phoebe Sharp; Mabel asked Mr. Bound what was his mission, and, finding that he had none, explained to him his awful needlessness. Joshua Sharp flitted from group to group, guile in his tongue, innocence in his eye. In short, every one was as comfortable as possible.

Suddenly, that black apparition, the native servant, appeared, ushering in Sir Rowland and Lady Gwyn.

SIR ROWLAND AND LADY GWYN.

ON the threshold of this fifth chapter we, the authors of this tale, are confronted with a new perplexity. Sir Rowland Gwyn being so great a man, it would be unseemly in us to introduce him to you cursorily, after having dealt with the life of Joshua Sharp at such great length. We must, then, accord him equal honour and review his history also. To do this properly and dramatically we must first speak of certain of the meaner fry of humanity with whom the democratic tendencies of our baronet brought him into contact. Here,

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then, is the biography of Sir Rowland Gwyn, in sketchy outline.

First, we are concerned with Martha Gibbs. At that interesting period of her life when she first met Robert Buttle, she was in the full bloom of glorious womanhood. She was at this time a great culinary artist, and her wages amounted to only £40 a year. Her curries were fit for Lucifer; her pastry a frothy dream of lightness; she could have compounded a toothsome fricassee out of a policeman's boot. Perhaps Robert Buttle knew this. He loved her with the passionate ardour of his race. He was sprung from a long line of ancestors who had served their country unflinchingly throughout the perilous variations of the English climate. Bob himself was a policeman.

One night, he was going his rounds

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in Woodville Road, Kensington. He was dressed in the simple uniform of his glorious profession. At his side dangled the truncheon of brief authority ; a picturesque waterproof cape hung upon his arm ; the hand that wielded the emblem of authority in the hour of danger now held the dreaded bull's-eye lantern.

Its piercing rays searched the basement windows, flashed into the smoke-dried front gardens, strayed playfully, at times, upon chimneypots. Nothing escaped the policeman's keen eye. A beggar woman selling matches cowered miserably against a wall. "Move on, —— you," said Buttle sternly, and the beggar fled.

Mr. Buttle moved on majestically, filled with the consciousness of duty done. The calm of the night stimulated his busy brain. He was stirred

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by vague yearnings of ambition. He looked about him for "a charge."

"No chance here," he muttered sadly, "Woodville Road's too respectable. Eh! what's that?"

He was opposite the last house in the road.

"Ha! I thought so!" The kitchen window's unlatched! True, there were iron bars, but it was a great discovery, for an unlatched window is a recognised peril.

"Lor! what's the matter?" cried a pleasant female voice as the back-door opened to his knock.

Mr. Buttle flashed his bull's eye playfully in the comely face of Martha Gibbs.

"Don't," said Martha coquettishly. "You 'urt my hyes, you naughty man."

"They're very pretty eyes, too," said Buttle gallantly.

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"I suppose you didn't knock us up to tell me that?"

"Well, no," said Buttle. "You've forgot to latch the kitchen window, my dear."

"Oh, is that all? The truth is, it's a bit stiff, and besides, there's bars."

"Ah, don't you trust too much to no bars," said Buttle wisely. "I'll come in and latch it for you."

Martha giggled.

"Perhaps you'll take a bit of supper, Mr. ——"

"Buttle—Robert Buttle," interjected the policeman. "And what's yours, my dear?"

"Martha Gibbs, and I'm the cook."

"You're a very pretty cook," said Buttle warmly.

Martha laughed and hit him playfully in the stomach.

"Go along," she said bashfully,

and led the way to the kitchen. But she was not displeased. Even great female artists are partial to flattery.

She had always admired the police, and she observed that Buttle was "a fine body of a man."

The family was away at the seaside. Mr. Buttle sat down and enjoyed the first of many suppers in the society of Martha Gibbs. It was midnight when he went away.

"Lor!" said Martha, "if he didn't forget to latch that winder after all."

* * * * *

Two years passed, but Martha remained Miss Gibbs. By a strange coincidence, Bob also remained Bob Buttle. They still "walked out" together, but Martha's unbridled ambition stood like a rock between the lovers and conjugal bliss. She vowed that she would never marry

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a mere constable. She bade him rise in his own or some other profession ; she was liberal enough to offer him the widest selection. When pressed to marry him, she always said : "No, dear Bob, I always did soar 'igh. Why don't you get promotion ? I'd marry you, if you was only a sergeant."

And Bob would sigh and cease to press her (except, indeed, physically). He too was ambitious and respected the ambition of his love. He often dreamed of performing some brilliant service which would win him advancement. Acts of mere valour he despised. He wanted to do something clever ; for, like most very stupid men, he was impressed deeply with his own sagacity. The detective branch of the Force was the goal of his ambitions.

"Give me time, Martha," he would plead. "I only want an opening, and then you'll see."

But his confidence did not bring conviction to the mind of Martha Gibbs. Bob's physique she admired, but she had little respect for his mental qualifications. Her brain rejected him, though her heart was touched.

One night Martha's mistress gave a dinner-party. Among the guests was Sir Rowland Gwyn, an eccentric baronet who had leased the house next door. He was a widower of five-and-forty, robust of figure. Sir Rowland posed as a Socialist, and was at war with society. His tastes and habits were essentially aristocratic, and he had an income of £5,000 a year. He was a harmless gentleman and a confirmed *bon vivant*; but he fancied himself a terrible revolu-

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tionary. For a brief space he had represented a pocket borough in the Liberal interests, and his political career had been a failure. This reverse confirmed his contempt for the British system of government, and his belief in his Socialist pose. He thundered against the Government in letters to the *Comet* and other advanced organs ; he would have ranted in Hyde Park, but that his speeches incited ridicule. The working-man would not take him seriously. A Socialistic baronet, with £5,000 a year, was felt to be quite impossible. But Sir Rowland had not lost confidence in himself. He still hoped to shake the foundations of thrones with his feeble pen, to be remembered by posterity as the Kensington Robespierre.

Mrs. Wargrave's little dinner was

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a turning point in the career of Sir Rowland. He sat down to dinner with poor appetite, but did justice to every course. Never had he tasted better soup, never had he enjoyed so superb a curry. The ice pudding was an artistic triumph, and Sir Rowland ate about two pounds of it. But for the miserable conventions of polite society, he would have finished the whole pudding.

“Great heavens!” he exclaimed when the ladies had gone. “Great heavens! what a dinner; and oh! what a cook!”

“Ah! I thought you’d be pleased,” said Sir Griffin Leopard, K.C.S.I. “I’ve always said that our hostess has one of the best cooks in all London.”

“A cook!” said Sir Rowland, “nay, an artist, a very goddess. If I hadn’t eaten so much, I’d go down to

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the kitchen and thank her upon my knees."

"Pray don't think of it," cried Sir Griffin. "You might be misunderstood."

Sir Rowland resisted the grateful impulse; but Martha's genius had roused his enthusiasm, and he felt that he could not rest until he had thanked her from his soul. He recognised that his gratitude was due to the cook, rather than to the mistress. Here his Socialism peeped out.

Next day, he spent hours in the garden, hoping to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Wargrave's cook. From the summer-house he commanded a view of his neighbour's territory, and there he waited, hour after hour. The very name of his benefactress was unknown to him, but he felt that he should recognize her by instinct.

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At length his patience was rewarded. Martha came out into the garden after luncheon and walked down the gravel path close to the wall. Sir Rowland flushed with excitement; he was not oblivious to the risk of being overlooked from the back windows. He did not wish to be suspected of flirting with his neighbour's servants. Such a scandal, however groundless, would banish him for ever from Mrs. Wargrave's table. He sickened at the dreadful thought.

Martha reached the end of the path and paused to examine some flowers. Sir Rowland popped his head over the wall.

"Good afternoon," he said obviously.

"Lor! how you startled me," cried Martha.

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"I beg a thousand pardons," said the baronet humbly. "I—I wanted so much to speak to you."

"I think you've made a mistake, sir," said Martha stiffly.

"To thank you from my soul," continued the baronet eagerly, "for the beautiful dinner I had the felicity of eating last night. Gad! I have never had such a dinner before in all my life."

Martha was touched. Her artistic vanity was her weak point.

"It ain't every one as appreciates good cooking," she said with a becoming blush.

"But I do," cried Sir Rowland eagerly. "I could not rest until I'd thanked you, though my gratitude is but a paltry tribute to your marvellous genius."

Martha smiled sweetly and threw him a coquettish glance.

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"Funny old gent," she thought.
"I believe I've mashed him; and
wouldn't Bob be savage if he knew."

"Next time you come to dinner,"
she said, "I'll do my very best. I
must be going in now, sir. You'd
best not be seen talking to me. The
missus might think you was trying
to get me away from her."

Sir Rowland gasped.

"What a brilliant idea!" he ex-
claimed. "You fill me with the
maddest hopes."

Martha drew back and looked
grave.

"What do you mean, sir?" she
asked doubtfully.

"One moment," cried Sir Rowland.
"Don't go yet."

"It ain't proper," said Martha
bashfully. "You'll get me the sack,
you know."

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"I only wish I could," he retorted boldly. "I'd engage you myself on the spot, at double wages."

"But you don't know what I get," suggested the temptress.

"I don't care. I'd offer you double."

"Mrs. Wargrave pays me £60 a year," observed Martha carelessly.

"Scandalous!" cried Sir Rowland. "It's downright sweating. I'll give you £120."

Martha shook her head.

"I don't know what to say," she said, laughing. "There's missus at the window. I must go."

Martha tripped away, and Sir Rowland slid down hastily from the wall.

"Damn! how annoying," he muttered. "I hope Mrs. Wargrave didn't see us."

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Mrs. Wargrave had not seen them, for, as Martha knew, the lady was enjoying her usual after-luncheon nap.

For the next two days Sir Rowland was feverishly impatient to see Martha again. He spent hours in the summer-house, but she did not appear. The idea of tempting her to desert Mrs. Wargrave was not to be banished. To do him justice, Sir Rowland made no effort to banish it. At any cost he would secure this ideal cook and live happy ever afterwards, untouched by remorse. He took to watching the front of the house for a change, and at length his patience triumphed. Martha went out one day to do some shopping. Sir Rowland followed and carried her basket in the broad light of day. Again he tempted Martha; again she affected

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hesitation. Finally she consented to enter his service at a salary of £150. It was a princely offer, but Martha's ambition soared even higher. She was content to begin as Sir Rowland's cook, but she hoped to end by becoming his wife.

At Sir Rowland's desire, Martha at once gave warning. Mrs. Wargrave cajoled and entreated, and offered to raise Martha's wages to £50. But Martha was firm. She did not tell her mistress that Sir Rowland had engaged her at thrice that salary ; she made no allusion to her plans.

By this time she had decided to jilt Bob Buttle, but she shrank from his reproaches and determined to bid him a literary farewell. On her last evening at Mrs. Wargrave's she sat down at the kitchen table and wrote Buttle a farewell letter. Emotion

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accentuated the grammatical and orthographical errors of her simple style. Scalding tears, mingled with blots, fell upon the paper. This is what she wrote :—

“ Dear bob, i ham levin this ouse for hever and we can never meat again because it is all hover between us and you are only a Cunstable thow I've waigted so long. i am very sorry dear bob to greeve you by this crewel letter (as you will think it) but it is best that we shud part without seing each other for I can never be your yfe.

“ So no more at present from your lovin MARTHA GIBBS.

“ P. S. Don't think of me anny more. x x x x x x x x x x ”

Martha sealed the letter with her thimble and posted it herself. Next

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morning she drove away in a four-wheeler, made an expensive *détour*, and entered Sir Rowland's house by the back door.

It was a manœuvre planned by the baronet, designed to prevent the detection of his unneighbourly conduct, and it was entirely successful.

Even Bob Buttle failed to trace Martha's movements, for she had told her fellow-servants that she had found a situation in the country. Sir Rowland soon wearied of the social restraints of London and set out on a tour of the world, taking his cook with him.

For months Bob Buttle suffered the bitter pangs of unrequited love. He "ran in" trivial offenders without respect to age or sex, and was in danger of developing into a woman-hater. From this dreary fate he was saved by a stroke of good fortune.

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Within a year of Martha's disappearance, Buttle, by a sheer fluke, apprehended a notorious criminal, and won promotion. He was admitted to the Detective branch of the police, and, in course of time, married a simple creature who revered his talents. In the tender admiration of Mrs. Buttle, the thick-headed detective basked like a lizard in sunshine, and almost forgot his first love.

Martha did not forget so easily her stalwart policeman, but she pursued the thorny path of ambition and eventually married her eccentric master. Sir Rowland fell an easy prey to the blandishments of his accomplished cook. He showed his scorn for the laws of society by conferring a title upon a great culinary artist.

But Lady Gwyn cooked for him no more.

CHAPTER VI.

PARADISE INVADED.

SIR ROWLAND and Lady Gwyn stood, beaming and panting, in the circle of Joshua Sharp's guests, undergoing the ordeal of introduction to each in turn. Lady Gwyn shed smiles on all as the sun sheds warmth and light; Sir Rowland maintained the dignity of a self-respecting Briton. The Baroness, Major Corso, and Mr. Bound speedily fell into the background, forgathering in a dim corner where hanging curtains half obscured them. Their laughter ran like an evil under-current through the strenuous tide of conversation.

Lady Gwyn turned to Joshua Sharp, as the crowd of visitors about her fell back to the walls.

"How cool you are in here!" she exclaimed in her high-pitched, foolish voice. "I declare I'm simply perishing for a cup of tea. It is so dreadfully hot outside."

At this juncture two servants entered carrying trays with tea and its accompaniments arranged on them.

"Ah, and muffins!" cried Lady Gwyn ecstatically, spying eagerly at the refreshments. "How truly gorgeous!" She addressed her husband. "Don't you remember, Sir Rowland," she said, anxious to air her insolent familiarity with the Peerage, "how Lord Howard Braxbourne did adore muffins?"

"Ah!" grunted Sir Rowland, frowning heavily. "And how Lord

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Howard Braxbourne did adore Lord Howard Braxbourne!"

Joshua Sharp interposed in a playfully shocked voice:

"What a terrible democrat you are, Sir Rowland!"

Lady Gwyn shook out her skirts with a gesture of extreme petulance.

"He positively makes me cross sometimes with his horrid ideas," she said—"him and Horace between them."

"For Heaven's sake don't bracket me with Horace, my dear," cried Sir Rowland testily. "Horace lacks the courage of his father's opinions. When I was his age I was known as the Kensington Robespierre, and before I was eight-and-twenty I was elected perpetual associate of the Consolidated Clickers."

"Whose untimely disintegration we

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all so deeply deplore," murmured Horace, covering his eyes.

Sir Rowland turned on him abruptly.

"I didn't know you were listening, sir," he said. "But since you have the effrontery to join in with your ill-timed buffoonery, let me tell you that the young men of my time were men with brains and energy. They did the things they had to do."

"It would have been easier not to do them."

"They took an intelligent interest in affairs."

"A money interest is so much more profitable."

"They left the world better than they found it."

"That's why they are dead. They would have done better to leave the world alone altogether. The

world is simply crying out to be left alone."

"Silence, sir. They are *not* dead."

"What, none of them!" cried Horace.

"Some, perhaps. Others are working still on the improvement of the race. Ah, you may sneer, but young men were young men, then."

"I have not denied it. They seem to me to have been very young indeed."

Sir Rowland snorted impatiently and turned about so suddenly in his anger that he almost overturned the tray of refreshments which Joshua Sharp was offering to Lady Gwyn.

"I beg your pardon," said Sir Rowland, rendered all the more irate by this threatened *contretemps*.

Joshua Sharp smiled suavely.

“Tea, Lady Gwyn?” he murmured.
“Muffins or crumpets?”

“Oh, muffins, please,” said she, simpering.

She made a careful selection. Joshua Sharp handed back the tray to the waiting servant and sat down beside her.

“Then there is at least one bond of sympathy between us,” he said. “To my mind the muffin is such a beautiful emblem of that solidity which is the first element of comfort. Lighter tastes may hanker for the volatile crumpet, honeycombed like life with aching voids, but for you and me—who have proved the world—the muffin has a charm of permanency that the crumpet may never hope to rival.”

“Crumpet, please!”
It was the emphatic voice of Mabel,

Gwyn sternly, twisting his heavy moustache.

"To everybody, I suppose," said Horace, a little startled by the Major's fierce demeanour.

"Not well known to me, sir," said the Major haughtily. "I doubt if I have ever seen a detective in my life. Good-bye, Mr. Sharp."

He held out his hand.

"You're not going?"

"I must."

"Good-bye."

He departed, striding heavily through the room with his head erect.

"What an extraordinary man!" cried Horace. "Who is he?"

"An army major."

"Is he a major?" cried Lady Gwyn. "In the regulars, I suppose? Is it a good regiment? What's his name?"

Joshua Sharp informed her.

"Oh, remind me to look him up in the Army List, dear," she said to Sir Rowland. "Perhaps we may meet him somewhere in Town. I do so adore soldiers."

"To get back from soldiers to policemen," said Sir Rowland, "I saw the triumvirate—to use Horace's ridiculous expression—I saw them again as I was coming down here. I believe they are dogging me. It is impossible to know why."

"You haven't been writing any Socialistical letters to the English papers, have you, dear?" asked Lady Gwyn anxiously. "You are so bold!"

"No, no," said Sir Rowland, "though I don't doubt they'd be glad enough to have me by the heels. I recollect once how the member for

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Murradon implored me not to criticise his Farthings Out Bill. But I did. Ha! ha! I made them quake."

Joshua Sharp roused himself from a deep reverie to observe :

"They can't be detectives, Mr. Gwyn. Perhaps they are Cook's tourists who have lost their tickets?"

"It would be the first verified instance of Nemesis overtaking a Cook's tourist," ventured Horace ; "and, anyway, I don't see how they could lose their tickets in our front-garden."

Here the Baroness and Mr. Bound caused a diversion by thrusting into the circle to bid their host adieu.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow," said the Baroness sentimentally.

"It is sorrow unqualified when the parting is done with money," said Mr. Bound.

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Joshua Sharp shook hands with them and they also departed.

“Who are those people?” asked Lady Gwyn anxiously.

“The man is Mr. Bound. He once edited an important London weekly,” said Joshua Sharp.

“Did he really!”

“The lady is the widow of a French baron, I believe.”

“Her name?” cried Lady Gwyn imperiously.

“The Baroness de Bancourt.”

Lady Gwyn turned to Sir Rowland.

“Is there any sort of French Peerage—like Debrett’s?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered.

“How provoking!” whined Lady Gwyn. “I do so want to know about her. It is so nice to be able to remember good sort of people.”

"Those policemen——" began Joshua Sharp.

"Oh, thank you so much for leading us back to them," cried Lady Gwyn. "I do so adore policemen."

"They are so—so calm, so massive," murmured Phœbe, catching Lady Gwyn's eye and feeling compelled to say something.

"The calmness of mental stagnation," interjected Mabel loftily. "Poor tombs of dead souls."

"Stationary while the world 'moves on,'" said Horace.

"I knew a policeman once," said Lady Gwyn softly. "Ah, he was a fine body of a man!"

"It is a matter of congratulation," said Joshua Sharp, "that policemen's minds are like their boots, all of one pattern and size. It would be indeed terrible if an ambitious policeman

should arise, a policeman with impulses—ideas ; one who might desire to convince people instead of convicting them."

"Ah," said Lady Gwyn sorrowfully, "that shows you have never been brought into close contact with a policeman."

Joshua Sharp stirred uneasily in his chair.

"There are pleasures that can wait," he said absently. He seemed anxious to turn the tide of conversation into other channels. "Won't you have another muffin, Lady Gwyn?" he asked.

"No, thank you," answered Lady Gwyn stiffly, as if she scented in this request a cruel reflection on her appetite. "Enough is as good as a feast."

"Damn that hoggish sentiment!"

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cried Sir Rowland, and added swiftly, "I beg your pardon. Enough is better than a feast, ever so much better. Don't I know how I suffer when there is roast duck. Roast duck is my one weakness."

"How brave you are, mamma, to say a thing like that!" cried Horace. "In these bizarre days so few people have the courage to be obvious. But women are ever in the van."

Lady Gwyn flushed angrily.

"Nonsense, Horace!" she exclaimed. "I never was in a van in my life."

"The van of progress, the van of progress, my dear," explained Sir Rowland.

Mabel threw up her eyes to the roof.

"People are too apt to confound movement with progress," she said.

She clasped her white hands. "Oh, this trivial merry-go-round of life!" she cried, "where everybody rides his wooden hobby-horse, day after day, day after day, and never stops until the blatant music ceases, and Death comes round to collect the fares!"

"Where men are as flies dancing in the brief sunlight," said Horace.

"Oh, do stop talking like that, Horace," exclaimed Lady Gwyn impatiently. "Why can't you try and speak like an ordinary man?"

"That is what the world is always asking me," said Horace Gwyn sadly. "To be ordinary is to be respectable, and to be respectable is to be a success, so the world says—as if respectability mattered. The world's ambition is to be unambitious. But I am weary of the stale platitudes of

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life. My soul craves for the vague unattainable—the beautiful bizarre!"

"Oh, drat them bazaars!" cried Lady Gwyn. "I never could a-bear 'em."

"When I was connected with the D.U.M.," said Joshua Sharp, "I inaugurated a bazaar with eminently satisfactory results. We netted eight hundred and sixty-three pounds and four husbands."

"I think they are positively dishonest," said Lady Gwyn, "selling a lot of trash, as they do, at four times its value, if it has got any value at all. Now there was a cushion——"

"Life itself——" began Horace.

"Now there was a cushion—there was a cushion," insisted Lady Gwyn, raising her voice. "Horace, I wish you wouldn't put me out. I declare I've clean forgot what I wanted to say."

"I was merely about to observe, mamma," said Horace severely, "that life itself is sold to us at four times its value, if it has any value."

"It hasn't," said Sir Rowland impatiently—"at least, usually."

"I know," cried Lady Gwyn, restored to good-humour again, though she kept a stern eye on her impudent stepson; "there was a cushion I had once. I bought it at the Duchess of Hamerton's bazaar. I paid four guineas for it—it was a sickly green and yeller concern; and I hadn't had it in the house two days before it was moulting feathers all over the place. And I'm sure dear Lord Howard Braxbourne——"

"Oh, damn dear Lord Howard Braxbourne!" vociferated Sir Rowland. "My dear, I again beg your pardon. But I do wish you wouldn't

remind me so often of my unfortunate accident of birth."

Lady Gwyn proceeded inexorably :

" And I'm sure dear Lord Howard Braxbourne, who called that week, must have thought we plucked our poultry in the drawing-room."

" I love bazaars," cried Phœbe enthusiastically. " I think they're just the best fun in the world. And I don't see how they can be dishonest. They do a lot of good, too. Just think ! four husbands ! "

Horace had been standing apart with his hand to his head. He now broke the silence with one pregnant word :

" Honesty ! "

Joshua Sharp turned on him quickly.

" My dear Mr. Horace," he said, speaking with a smile of slight con-

descension as he laid his hand on the young man's arm, "the question of what is honest and what is dishonest cannot be answered in an epigram. I have studied the matter earnestly from every conceivable point of view, and I say emphatically that there is no such thing as an honest man!"

"Diogenes has the disadvantage," murmured Horace.

"Oh, papa!" cried Phœbe, recovering suddenly from the shock of her father's words.

"Honesty is every man's pose," said Joshua Sharp. "It is one of the many shuttlecocks that we toss about with the battledores of respectability and never lay hold on with our hands. An inherent instinct of human nature is to get things without paying for them."

"Oh, papa's only joking, you

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know," cried Phoebe, turning on the company and trying to smile gaily, though she was obviously distressed. " You can't think, Lady Gwyn, how awfully particular he is about settling our weekly bills."

" Ha, ha!" laughed Sharp. " You see my little girl knows me better than I know myself."

" If every man knew himself he would have at least one very undesirable acquaintance," observed Horace.

" Oh, how true that is!" cried Mabel.

Sir Rowland snorted.

" I hope you feel better for the loss of that, Horace," he remarked. " We feel distinctly worse for the gain of it."

Lady Gwyn plucked her husband's sleeve.

" I believe that Miss West has

designs on our poor boy, Rowland," she whispered behind her fan. "I've had it on my mind a long time. Horace would be sure to be attracted by that sort of girl. A mere companion too! . . . Now, if it had been Miss Sharp."

But Sir Rowland checked her.

"No, no," he said, "I believe in natural selection."

"You're being improper, I know you are," said Lady Gwyn.

"Bosh! . . . Look here, my dear, don't you interfere. *I* don't care who he marries, so long as she isn't an aristocrat. What does it matter if she is a bit foolish? And she has brains. She'll grow out of all her high-falutin' nonsense in time, never fear——"

"I wish you would try to be less slangy, dear."

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"And so will he." He cast a critical glance toward Mabel West. "By Jove, she's pretty too!" he murmured, chuckling. "The young dog!"

"Sir Rowland!"

Lady Gwyn's lips tightened. Her face took on an expression of keen disgust.

"Hark!" cried Joshua Sharp.

The sound of music came to them, soft, fitful, now swelling to rich cadences, now dwindling to a melodious murmur.

"Our friends the minstrels," exclaimed Phœbe, springing up and clapping her hands. She ran to the window and mounted on the seat.

"I love music. It is so moral," said Sharp.

"Oh, do come and look at them, everybody," cried Phœbe. "They

are so sweetly picturesque with their quaint dresses and weird instruments. Oh, and the dear little boy! Do come and look at this dear little boy, Mab! I could positively eat him!"

The party moved toward the window and looked out.

Within the borders of the garden the great flowers, so variously tinted, drooped their heavy heads amid the green, in the glare of the sun. Beyond, was a white waggon-way, fringed with trees and shrubs and upspringing blossoms of the wilderness. There the humming-birds flitted, and winged insects swam in the sunbeams. In the purple shadow of some mighty cacti the minstrels were ranged along the road. There were five of them, forming a family-party. One of the children was a tiny tot, quite naked, with a

round, brown belly, woolly head, and plump limbs, who blew his joyous childhood into a quaint rusty little trumpet with a whole-souled intensity that was the acme of absurdity. The other children were on the borderland of youth. The mother, in a gorgeous green robe, beaded sandals, and white, wrinkled trousers, was faded and grey, but she smiled valiantly and winsomely despite the world and time, revealing two rows of shining teeth behind her shrivelled lips. The man was handsome and alert, with an honest, eager face and restless, admonitory hands. The woman sang.

Suddenly Sir Rowland cried out :

“ I say, look ! ”

“ What ? ” asked Lady Gwyn, peering about with the feverish eagerness of the short-sighted.

“ Those three confounded burglar fellows again,” said Sir Rowland, pointing beyond the waggon-way, where paths of dun earth ran in and out among the wild undergrowth.

Everybody looked and cried out, “ Where? ” and thrust and jostled his neighbour in his overwhelming anxiety to see what was happening.

“ Over there—skulking round the plantain trees,” said Sir Rowland.

“ I see them,” said Horace. “ There they go. Now they’re behind that croton! There! See? They seem to be watching the house. They’re on the path now. You can see them quite plainly. Oh, they are policemen! I’m sure they are.”

Joshua Sharp was among the most eager to catch a glimpse of these watchers of his house. At last he saw them emerging from a clump of

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wild white flower, that bedewed them with quivering petals as they passed and covered their shoulders as with snow. He started back, drawing in his breath sharply, so that his cheeks sagged and the muscles of his jaws stood out. He withdrew hastily from the window. All the dignity had gone out of him. His body trembled limply.

"I believe they are indeed Scotland Yard fellows," he said under his breath. "Those horrid heavy jowls and spying eyes!... I know the breed so well." He put his hand to his lips. "God!" he thought; "if—"

Great drops of sweat studded his forehead. He controlled his shaking limbs, drew up a chair and sat down at a table to reflect and determine.

Phœbe turned her face toward him.

"Papa, papa, come and throw the minstrels some money," she said.

His hands gripped the table. When he answered, his pleasant, high-toned voice was in curious contrast to his working, quivering face. He averted his head, fearing to meet her eyes as he spoke.

"You throw it to them," he said.
"I can't be bothered."

"But I haven't any change, papa," cried Phoebe, "and I can't aim straight. I should throw it among the flowers. Why can't you come to the window and look at them?"

"I'd rather not, my dear," he said, his voice becoming harsh, despite his struggle to control it. "I'd very much rather not," he added, under his breath, betraying his unconquerable sense of humour even in this

hour of fierce inward stress. "I'm afraid of the draught," he added weakly.

"What nonsense! There isn't a breath of air stirring," said Phœbe, with the quick petulance of a spoilt child. "Do come."

Joshua Sharp cried out :

"Oh, my back! I can't come, my dear. I want to sit down. I don't feel well."

Phœbe, stricken with remorse, moved toward him, but he waved her back.

"I shall be all right. Don't bother," he said.

Phœbe faltered a moment, then went to the window again. One of the elder children was now dancing.

"I say, Miss Sharp," cried Horace, "you can see those fellows now as plain as middle-aged virtue. I'm

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sure they're policemen or detectives or something of that sort."

"Would you tell me, Miss West, if my glasses have slipped over my shoulder and are hanging down my back?" implored Lady Gwyn of Mabel.

"Yes, here they are," said Mabel.

"Thank you. I'm so blind."

She fixed the glasses across her nose.

"Now, Horace, show me these men. Oh, I see them. . . . Oh!—Oh!—Oh!"

She became unaffectedly agitated. Her rosy face paled, her mouth trembled.

"Er—er—Sir Rowland," she said in her husband's ear, "give me my smelling-salts."

No one had particularly marked her distress, so absorbing was the

prevalent interest in the minstrels. Sir Rowland turned to her with a puzzled face.

“Your smelling-salts, my dear,” he stammered.

“Where are they? Where are they?” she cried, beating the air frantically.

He was used to her vagaries and handed the smelling-salts to her without a word, turning at once to the window again.

Lady Gwyn retreated to a corner. She was too overpowered by her private emotions to observe Joshua Sharp, sitting drooping with his head in his hands.

“It’s Bob, it’s Bob,” she whispered. “I know it’s him. I’d know it anywhere and anywhen. Oh, Bob, Bob, Bob!”

The tears of remembrance mingled

with those other tears the smelling-salts had brought to her eyes. She brushed them hastily away as a door opened at her right hand and Mr. Girdleberry entered the room. He did not seem to observe her ; his whole demeanour was flurried and distraught. He crossed to Joshua Sharp and touched him on the shoulder.

“ Oh, Mr. Sharp, Mr. Sharp ! Oh, sir ! ” he faltered.

Joshua Sharp gazed anxiously at him.

“ What is it, Girdleberry ? What is it ? ” he whispered. “ Hush ! That woman ! ”

Girdleberry turned about, and, for the first time, noticed Lady Gwyn. She seemed oblivious of their presence ; she was rocking herself to and fro and sighing dolefully. Suddenly, she got up and departed, with bent

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head, through the door by which Girdleberry had entered.

"What is it?" asked Sharp again, this time more calmly.

"We're done for," said Girdleberry hoarsely. He had been running and his breath came in great gasps. "The Act's passed. The detectives are here watching the house."

He drew a letter from his pocket, which Sharp snatched from him and read. As he read his face grew grey, and at the end he staggered slightly.

"S-sh!" he whispered, recovering himself.

Both men gazed about them as if they feared an ambuscade lurked within that room. The chatter at the window came to them like the meaningless voice of the wind or the sea. It was something remote, outside the hour and their desperate

state. Yet there was an irony in it, too, as there must be in all things that move on equably and normally whilst one stops aghast.

The voice of Phœbe crying out, "Papa, papa, you're missing it all. Why don't you come to the window?" made no dint on their consciousness, as they sat there, face to face with one another and with retribution.

CHAPTER VII.

MARRIAGE—AND THE WAY OUT.

THE minstrels tarried long in the vicinity of the house, ever encouraged to renewed effort by showers of coppers. Joshua Sharp and Girdleberry stole, unnoticed, from the room, to discuss in private what could be done. They decided to desert the house that night and escape across the country to a remoter state, as yet untouched by civilization's hand. There, beyond the pale of the Criminal Code, life loomed safe and fair. Having settled the plan of action and instructed Girdleberry to arrange details as expeditiously as

possible, Joshua Sharp went back to the room where he had left his guests.

They had all betaken themselves to the garden, with the exception of Sir Rowland Gwyn, who, pleading fatigue, had been mercifully allowed to remain. He now lay extended in a long, low, canvas chair, fast asleep.

Joshua Sharp stood regarding the unconscious baronet. He kicked over a stool. At the noise Sir Rowland started up with a curse, rubbing his eyes.

“Oh, I’m so awfully sorry!” cried Joshua Sharp. “I wouldn’t have aroused you for worlds.”

Sir Rowland grunted and yawned.

“Is that you, Sharp?” he said.
“Why, I must have fallen asleep.”

“Ah!”

“I fall asleep very easily.”

"Yes, yes."

Yet I would lay a wager I could keep awake with any man."

"It is the will power that does it," said Joshua Sharp vaguely.

"If there's no use in my being awake I fall asleep," said Sir Rowland. "I do it on purpose, habitually. It's a grand thing for the intellect, an occasional nap. It sets the brain up so. Just as your faculties are drooping you get a quiet five minutes —then, hey presto! you are off to sleep and awake again, fresh and vigorous. You should try it, Sharp."

"I haven't that great command of myself," said Sharp, smiling sorrowfully. "If I feel drowsy I just let Nature take her course, but I could never compel sleep to come to me." He paused. "You won't be annoyed

if I say so?" he asked. "I know your contempt for the popular heroes of ancient and contemporary history."

"Oh no, go on," said Sir Rowland.

"But really don't you think that is rather a remarkable faculty of yours—that faculty of compelling sleep? Isn't it currently reported that Napoleon was like that?"

"I disapprove of Napoleon altogether," said Sir Rowland loftily, though he was grinning with gratification at the other's words. "Napoleon was quite unnecessary and superfluous."

"You are so advanced," murmured Sharp, with a deprecating gesture. "Napoleon seems such a very big man to me."

"He imposes on a lot of people, I know. He looms large through a mist of lurid splendour."

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"What a grand phrase!" cried Joshua Sharp. "Lurid splendour! I go in a little for phrase-making myself, but I've never said anything half as good as that."

"You're pulling my leg?" said Sir Rowland, half doubtfully.

"My dear Sir Rowland Gwyn!" cried Joshua Sharp, shocked beyond measure by the imputation. "As if I could!"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Sir Rowland. "Yes, it's not bad. 'Lurid splendour!'"

"What are your politics—if it isn't impertinent to ask?" ventured Joshua Sharp. "I'm mildly Radical myself."

"I hold with no party," said Sir Rowland. "I would have Parliaments abolished altogether, with kings and so on. I am unconditionally for

equality all round. My desire is to see all class distinctions done away with, and the whole world free and healthy. I have been called a Socialist. Well, that's near enough, anyway, though I would be sorry to subscribe to half the rot that is talked —by ill-educated boys mostly—in the sacred name of Socialism."

"Unfortunately," said Joshua Sharp, "the strength of a cause is usually measured by the utterances of its weakest supporters. I confess that at one time I was a bitter opponent of Socialism; but that was before I met you. Now, I am firmly persuaded that Socialism in its extremest form is the world's one chance of complete regeneration."

"It does me good to hear you say so," murmured Sir Rowland.

"So convinced am I of this,"

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continued Joshua Sharp, "that I have even ventured to do something on my own initiative for the cause."

"No, really!" cried Sir Rowland.

"Yes," said Joshua Sharp, modestly drooping his eyes. "I have been so bold. I have in my mind a scheme which I earnestly hope will prove of service to Socialism. The whole thing is quite in train already; every detail has been brought out; it only remains to put my theories into immediate practice."

"You interest me beyond measure," cried Sir Rowland. "Pray proceed."

"I propose first to experiment on the aborigines of this very country," said Joshua Sharp. "You see, I am naturally distrustful of the efficiency of my scheme and I should be loth to spring it suddenly upon a highly-

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civilized community without having first tested it by a lower standard. It seems to me that the natives of Berona are the very people upon whom to try the effects of my project before carrying its principles into action in Europe. They are quite children of nature, primitive, untrammelled by any conventions, the slaves of their own impulses and appetites. They——”

“I am impatient for the details of your scheme,” interrupted Sir Rowland.

Joshua Sharp stopped short in great embarrassment.

“To tell you the frank truth,” he said, “I had no intention of speaking to you about this. My project is so very near my heart—it seems to my defective judgment so perfect in all its essentials, that I am half

afraid to submit it to your vigorous criticism. I am but an amateur in these matters, a mere dabbler in the immense science of sociology, whilst you——”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“No, no, no,” cried Sir Rowland Gwyn earnestly. “Don’t be afraid. I feel convinced from what you have already said that there is a great deal in your idea.”

“If you say so——”

“I do say so. Come, Mr. Sharp, don’t balk yourself.”

Joshua Sharp inclined his head.

“But first,” he said, “I should like to have your views on marriage.”

Sir Rowland gazed about apprehensively.

“Would you mind looking to see if Lady Gwyn is anywhere about?” he asked. “You know what women are.”

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“Yes, yes,” said Joshua Sharp sympathetically.

He went to the window and looked out.

“Lady Gwyn is right at the farther end of the garden,” he announced. “She is sitting with my daughter, apparently in earnest conversation.”

“Are you sure?”

He followed Joshua Sharp to the window to assure himself.

“That’s all right,” he said. “Well, I’ll tell you. My views on matrimony are peculiar. To be honest, I disapprove of it altogether. I put it into the category of the Unnecessary—with kings and so on.”

“I am with you,” said Joshua Sharp. “Now, how would you propose to do away with the evils of the married state?”

“No, no!” cried Sir Rowland.

"That isn't fair. What do *you* propose?"

"It seems to me," said Joshua Sharp, "that the world is very intent on marriage just now—at least, the feminine half of it ; and if we would do anything we must proceed cautiously. Much harm has already been done by the too-hasty promulgation of views —right enough in themselves, but too advanced to meet with popular acceptance. Haste must be avoided, care must be exercised, or the very object of our enterprise will be defeated in its inception. Since the world is so set on matrimony—since it persists in getting married at every inconvenient season and on the smallest provocation—we must aim not so much at preventing marriage as at providing an easy means out of it. Already, I have made a few notes

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which I hope to extend into a book to be called *Marriage—and the Way Out*. It might form a sort of primer to the first principles of our mission."

"If I understand you," said Sir Rowland, "your idea is to make divorce easy and expeditious."

"Exactly!" said Joshua Sharp eagerly.

"Then I am with you, heart and soul. To my mind, the only excuse for marriage is the existence of divorce. At present, it is a weak excuse—the law is absurdly circumscribed; but with energy and perseverance much may be done to strengthen it."

"The next best thing to a good deed is a good excuse for a bad one," said Joshua Sharp.

"Exactly. I am keenly interested in your scheme. I shall watch its development very closely."

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A flush overspread the face of Joshua Sharp.

"Ah, there it is," he said. "I doubt if the scheme will ever have any development."

"Nonsense!"

"To be quite candid with you," said Joshua Sharp, "I did not intend to tell you of my idea. It is a sort of—of secret. May I be forgiven if I confess to a desire to have all the glory of achievement to myself, if any achievement were possible."

"The feeling is natural," said Sir Rowland magnanimously; "but none the less to be deprecated. It shows weakness. Now, of course, you cannot keep the matter from me, and I insist on knowing what it is that stands between your project and its consummation in practice."

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“I would rather not tell you,” faltered Joshua Sharp.

“You must tell me, I insist.”

“Briefly, then, the obstacle is lack of funds. You must know, as well as I do, that nothing great is to be accomplished without the aid of money. I and a few friends of mine who are with me in this have subscribed a couple of hundred pounds, but it is not sufficient, and the cause droops.”

“Of course,” said Sir Rowland, “you will allow me——”

“No, no.”

“Oh, you must.”

“I would rather not. It would be parting from our reward to accept help from outside, and we are human enough to hope for reward—that reward of fame and love which the world extends to its reformers.”

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"I am surprised," cried Sir Rowland, "that you should allow personal feeling to deter you from accepting any help that might be a means to your great end."

"It is weak of me."

"You must allow me to make a first donation of £100 towards the working expenses of the society. Here it is in English bank-notes—they are current anywhere ; that's why I always carry them about with me when travelling."

"Really, Sir Rowland——"

"Not another word."

"You shall have a receipt," said Joshua Sharp, pocketing the money slowly. "Oh, here is my authority for——"

"My dear Mr. Sharp, put it away. I don't want to see it."

"Yes," said the other, with a touch

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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of hauteur, "you must see it. It is due to me, as well as to yourself."

Sir Rowland Gwyn glanced over the document, whilst Sharp wrote out and stamped the receipt.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INVADERS.

CHEEP—cheep—cheep !

It was the twittering of the wild
night birds.

Whir-r-r—whir-r-r—whir-r-r !

It was the scampering of lizards in
the rank undergrowth.

How—how—how ?

The patient dogs were asking
questions of the moon.

The fireflies dotted the blackness
with golden sparks. An army of
frogs croaked hoarsely, squatting in
the stagnant, bronze green mud of
a vanishing pool. The feathery trees

were outlined darkly against the sky ; a shining leaf catching the light of the moon showed brightly silver.

Yellow light poured forth from the long French windows of the room where Joshua Sharp sat dining with his guests, touching the bushes, throwing gaunt shadows across the paths. From the distance sounded a gurgle and splash, gurgle and splash, of falling water.

Three dark forms stole warily along the wide waggon-way beyond the hedge in the shadow of the mighty palms. The foremost figure halted ; the following figures halted too, crouching down near to the earth and listening.

“ S-sh ! ” whispered the foremost figure.

“ S-sh ! ” echoed the other two figures.

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There was a pause. A burst of laughter came from the house. The inquisitive dog awoke from a short silence and asked the moon again—
“How—how—how?”

All the unuttered longings of the lower creation were expressed in its mournful bark. The meaning of numberless brute eyes, upraised to man in pathetic inquiry from ages immemorial, became suddenly manifest.

“S-sh!” whispered the foremost figure.

And the other two figures echoed the sound again.

“Cowrie—Mears!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do what you see me do.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you ever know Bob Buttle to fail?”

“No, sir.”

“ Then follow me.”

The foremost figure crossed the rugged waggon-way and rose up slowly against the high, wooden gate. Two muscular hands grasped the topmost bar. A grunt, a grating of leather on wood, a heavy breath, a final hoist, and the figure of a man stood out in silhouette high against the sky.

“ S-sh ! ”

“ S-sh ! ”

“ I don’t see nobody. You come along after me.”

One by one the three men climbed the gate and dropped upon the gravel within. They huddled together in the shadow. A sweep of lawn broken by low bushes inclined from them to the house. They stood watching. At last the leader, Bob Buttle, advanced toward the centre of the garden.

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"Your lantern, Cowrie," he whispered.

Cowrie handed the lantern to him. He held the bull's eye down and opened the slide. A circle of light fell upon the grass. It quivered, describing weird circles, and glanced off to the bushes.

"S-sh!"

"S-sh!"

A table was discovered under the over-arching boughs of a thick treefern. Slowly the three men advanced toward it. There was a plate, stained red with fruit, upon the table, and, lying beside it, a pair of spectacles, gold-rimmed.

"Ah!" cried Buttle.

"Ah!" cried Cowrie.

"Ah!" cried Mears.

"Take your lantern a moment, Cowrie," said Buttle. "Turn the

light this way." He picked up the spectacles and examined them carefully through a spy-glass. "Impound them, Mears."

Mears obeyed.

"Now follow me again."

They prowled about the garden, peering into the bushes, pulling apart the flowers, examining the gravel.

Suddenly a richer band of light fell across the lawn. The three men, glancing back, saw that one of the French windows had been opened, revealing a confused view of the room beyond. A man was coming out. He stepped on to the lawn.

"Quick—hide!" whispered Buttelle.
"Cowrie, mask the lantern."

They crouched down among the bushes.

"Your pistols. Cover him."

There was an ominous click—click.

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The outcoming man drew nearer and nearer. Presently he stood revealed in the mingled lamp-light and moonshine. He was clad in loose robes and a great turban. His dark face shone in the slanting rays.

“Seize him!”

The three men stole out from their hiding-place and pounced upon the man, pressing their pistols to his head. His terror was extreme; his legs collapsed under him and his eyes rolled. They held him up, swearing mightily under their breath. He chattered volubly in an unknown tongue, trying to express with his captive hands his plea for mercy from the fate that seemed to threaten him.

“Hold still!” growled Buttle. “Don’t wriggle like an eel. We ain’t going to hurt you.”

"Hu-jah! hu-jah!" pleaded the black huskily.

"Silence! Now then, drop this nonsense and answer my questions."

The fellow's feet shot out and he subsided slowly upon the lawn, beating the earth with his palms as he gazed imploringly into the faces of his assailants.

"S-sh!" whispered Buttle fearfully, looking back at the bright windows of the house. "He'll bring out the blooming household with his jabber. Shut up. Put your hand over his mouth, Mears, while I ask him some questions. No, that won't be any use. Here, make him stand up."

They dragged the trembling wretch to his feet again, and tried to reassure him. At last he grew calmer, as he began to see that they meant him no

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immediate injury, though he still quaked visibly. The tears were in his eyes and his mouth drooped at the corners.

"Hu-jah! hu-jah!" he murmured at intervals, looking from face to face.

"Come now, Mr. White," said Buttle, "isn't Mr. Sharp dining at this house to-night with your master?"

A gleam of intelligence lighted up the dusky face.

"Ah, Sharp—Sharp—Sharp!" cried the black.

Buttle smiled self-approvingly and clapped him upon the shoulder.

"Ah ha!" he cried, looking round triumphantly at his men. "You savvy Sharp. Stout old chap—moustache—stiff in the back, eh?" He went through elaborate pantomime to elucidate his words.

The servant, overcome with new

fear, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"Another of these benighted heathens," Buttle cried despairingly. "They're all the same. You can't find out a blessed thing in this here blooming country. . . . Here. Attend. Don't jabber like a monkey, you fool ! Speak out like a man."

But no amount of bullying could teach the poor fellow the English language in five minutes. He still shook his head.

"Ah, well," said Buttle resignedly, "it don't matter much. Sharp's here right enough." He raised his hand. "S-sh ! What was that ?" he whispered.

A voice came from the house.

"Now then, now then, can't you find those spectacles ?"

It was a pleasant, high-toned voice,

but with a note of irritability in it just now.

"This is very awkward," whispered Buttles. "It don't give us no chance to take our bearings."

He and his assistants stood gazing toward the house, doubtful as to their next proceeding. A straight, spare figure stood at the open French window for a moment. It was the figure of Joshua Sharp. He shaded his eyes and peered into the darkness.

"Can't you find those spectacles?" he cried.

Mears had clapped his great hand to the black servant's mouth, so that he was quite unable to answer his master's inquiry.

"It's very strange," murmured Joshua Sharp.

He turned to say a word of apology to his guests, then advanced

into the garden, walking gingerly through the grass as if he feared to tread upon some noxious reptile or fall into an ambush. At last the dimly-defined figures of the detectives and their black captain became visible to him, and he stopped.

"Who are you?" he asked hoarsely.

There was no answer; Buttle was so confused at Joshua Sharp's sudden appearance that he could find no words to reply.

"Who are you, I say?" repeated Joshua Sharp. He came forward slowly. "What do you want here?"

Buttle, at last recovering himself, doffed his hat and bowed low. He whispered aside to his men, "All right. Master of the house. I'll manage him." He turned and addressed Sharp, smiling urbanely.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," said Buttle reassuringly.

"Alarmed! Oh no, I am not alarmed. I am only bewildered."

"Of course, of course."

"What do you want?" reiterated Sharp.

Buttle hesitated.

"I believe I have the honour to address Sir Rowland Gwyn?" he said, inclining his head.

"Eh?" gasped Sharp. But in an instant he had realized the detective's blunder and resolved to profit by it. He bowed and smiled: he could not trust himself to speak.

"That's all right," said Buttle. "Trust me to find out a little thing like that. It's my business to know all about people."

"I perceive you are a man of remarkable acumen," said Sharp suavely.

"I'm generally considered pretty wide awake, sir. Here's my card. *Robert Buttle*, you see, sir. Everything in order, sir."

"Well, what do you want?" asked Sharp, once more.

"Come farther into the bushes, sir, if you don't mind," said Buttle, looking about anxiously. "I shouldn't like them inside to hear us just yet."

Joshua Sharp followed him deeper into the shadow. Cowrie and Mears fell back respectfully.

"It's like this," began Buttle. "You've got a notorious character under your roof?"

"What do you mean?" inquired Sharp haughtily.

Buttle winked.

"I mean Joshua Sharp. That's who I mean. Stout old chap—moustache—stiff in the back, sir?"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense," said Sharp. "My guest, sir. A most worthy and respectable gentleman. You are evidently making a mistake."

"Not me, sir, not me. Come now, Sir Rowland, I'm afraid I must ask you to give me some little assistance in this affair. Our man's here right enough—why, we've seen him, we have!—and here's my warrant for him."

Obeying an irresistible impulse Joshua Sharp snatched at the scrap of paper, but Buttle drew it away hastily and held it behind his back.

"No, no, sir. I can't let it out of my hand," he said.

"Why not?" demanded Sharp. "I want to read it." He caught a glimpse of the black servant's curious face over the detective's shoulder.

"Go away, Hamer," he said, motioning the fellow towards the house.

"A-ah!" said the servant, and stole silently away.

Joshua Sharp addressed Buttle again.

"Come," he said, "let me read the warrant."

"Certainly, you may read it, sir," said the detective. "Here, Cowrie, strike a light."

Cowrie lit a match. It burned steadily in the still, warm air, describing a circle of dim radiance that included the surrounding bushes and drew out of the darkness numberless specks of vivid colour. All seemed unreal, ghostly : the flowers and shrubs were as wraiths of themselves, ethereal, intangible as the fancies of a dream. Only the clustered faces of the detectives seemed real ;

and they were prosaic enough. The face of Joshua Sharp was of that pale, ascetic type which lends itself readily enough to a suggestion of mystery and romance. He might have been some old Franciscan monk awaiting a manifestation of the divine in the sombre solitude.

Buttle smoothed out the warrant and held it up before Sharp, whilst Cowrie held the flaming match aloft. Sharp bent his eager face close to the paper and read:—

“Victoria, by the grace of God.” He mumbled under his breath, “Um-m-m.” His thin lips puckered and he whistled softly a dolorous note. “Dear me, dear me!” he exclaimed. “I wouldn’t have had this happen for the world. It is most unpleasant. I can’t have him arrested in my house. You must

wait till he gets home. He lives quite near."

"Very sorry, sir," murmured Buttle.

"But there are ladies," cried Joshua Sharp. "It would be so very unpleasant. I really couldn't allow it. And surely it will make no difference—you can arrest him just as easily another time."

"You see—" began Buttle deferentially.

"No, no. I can't talk with you. Go away now, *please*."

"Sorry, sir," resumed Buttle, more firmly; "but we can't lose sight of our man. If you only knew the trouble we've had, you'd understand better. He's the artfullest codger out. For instance, though he had so many friends in England—some of 'em are still his friends, in spite

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of what he's done—he ain't had a photograph of himself took for nigh on fifteen year. We've had to rely on the personal descriptions of his enemies for means of identifying him. And you know what that is. According to them he was uglier than Moll Catch of Ballyrowan. That's vindictiveness, that is. Then there was a sketch of him speaking at a meeting at Exeter Hall in one of the evening papers. We relied on that a lot at first, until we found out that the same sketch had done duty for a picture of Gladstone, Goschen, Professor Huxley, Chamberlain, Marks the murderer, Jem Smith, President Cleveland, and Arthur Orton."

Buttle spoke disgustedly, but Joshua Sharp laughed.

"It's awkward, of course," he said, becoming grave. "And I sympathize

with you. But, once for all, I can't have the arrest made in my house."

Buttle scratched his head viciously.

"Well now, look here," he said at last. "Tell you what I'll do, as you've been so kind."

"Well?"

"If you'll let us stay here I promise I won't arrest him till he's off your premises."

"I can't let you stay here," said Sharp, growing more haggard. "It's preposterous. I have a party on."

Buttle heaved a great sigh of regret.

"Then there's no alternative," he said. "I must arrest him at once."

He moved toward the house, Cowrie and Mears following him. Sharp flew to detain him.

"It's no use, sir," said Buttle. "Duty's duty and must be done."

"No, no, no, no," cried Sharp,

clutching his sleeve. "Wait a minute, just a minute—while I think. There may be some other way."

"I'm afraid not, sir," said Buttles stubbornly.

Joshua Sharp shook his hand impatiently to enjoin silence. He stood for a few moments steeped in thought. At last he stirred and turned a mournful face to the detective.

He was about to speak when there came to them a sound of footsteps advancing by slow, cautious strides over the grass.

"Here's a pretty mess," growled Buttles. "Well, sir, it's got to come now, anyhow."

Joshua Sharp was panic-stricken. He moved his head quickly from side to side like a captive beast; his breathing was short and loud.

He contrived to gasp out, "Who's

that?" Then he fell to trembling silence. Fortunately or unfortunately (as you will) the detectives were too intent on the approaching figure to mark his agitation.

A voice came out of the gloom:

"It's me—Girdleberry. I was coming out to see if I could help you to find your spectacles."

He was quite close now, and stopped, confused, at sight of the strangers.

"A moment, Mr. Buttle," said Sharp quickly. "I must speak to this gentleman. He—he—he has a weak heart. You—you might shock him to death."

He did not await the detective's permission but went quickly to Girdleberry and murmured in his ear:

"Don't show your astonishment. These are the detectives. They think I'm Sir Rowland." Aloud, he added,

drawing Girdleberry towards Buttle, "These gentlemen are detectives from Scotland Yard."

The whispering apart had stirred Buttle's bile. He was inclined to be ultra-official.

"Sir Rowland, I am surprised that you should betray—" he began angrily.

"Dear Mr. Buttle, I assure you it's all right," said Sharp, very sweetly. "This is my friend and private secretary. He is entirely in my confidence. Believe me, on my word of honour, you may trust him."

Buttle was appeased.

"How do you do, sir?" he said to Girdleberry. "Sorry to make your acquaintance, sir, under such unfavourable circumstances."

"Er—er," stammered Girdleberry, hardly grasping the situation, for he

was a slow-witted man. "Er—delighted at any time, I'm sure."

Buttle winked in the darkness and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"The fact is, sir," he said, "we're after Mr. Joshua Sharp, who is staying here. Don't look surprised. *We* know, bless you. Stout old chap—moustache—stiff in the back—ha, ha!"

Mr. Robert Buttle was by this time firmly persuaded—or it would seem so—that his lively impersonation of Sir Rowland Gwyn's physical peculiarities was the acme of humour. He repeated the performance with greater gusto than ever, and chuckled in huge delight at his own wit. Cowrie and Mears chuckled too to countenance the mirth of their superior; Sharp and Girdleberry smiled indulgently.

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"However," resumed Buttle, as one renouncing pomps and vanities, "that's neither here nor there."

"I beg your pardon?" murmured Girdleberry.

"A colloquialism," explained Sharp. "It means nothing. Proceed, Mr. Buttle."

Buttle frowned at the interruption.

"I was going to say," he continued, "that Sir Rowland here doesn't care about having Mr. Joshua Sharp arrested in his house."

Girdleberry shook his head, and replied, somewhat irrelevantly, it seemed :

"Ah, Sir Rowland, you see I was right in not trusting that man."

"Yes, yes, you were. I must admit it now."

"You are so unsuspicious, sir." He turned to the detectives. "Sir

Rowland is a perfect child," he said, "in his ignorance of evil."

Joshua Sharp turned on Girdleberry with a smile of ineffable sweetness.

"Girdleberry," he said, with trenchant softness, "remember this: that though to doubt all men is to be prosperous, to trust them is to be happy!"

CHAPTER IX.

POST-PRANDIAL.

DESSERT was on the table: big, bursting grapes, golden melons, bananas and other fruit of the tropics. The guests of Joshua Sharp sat chatting at the disordered table. The ladies, following a usage of the house, were not to retire, but sat at ease enjoying those good things that are born in wine and uttered through smoke. There was no smoke yet and the good things drooped weakly with the flowers, for the host was away and banal conjecture overbore the wit of the party. Suddenly, through the French windows, great globes of

brilliant colour were seen to spring up in the gloom of the garden. Two swarthy servants in white robes became visible, moving with swift grace among the low bushes on the lawn.

“I think we may go out in the garden now and take our coffee there,” ventured Phœbe timidly. “We do it usually, and the servants are lighting up, I see.”

“But Mr. Sharp?” queried Sir Rowland.

“Perhaps papa is waiting out there, too. He may not have thought it worth while to come back.”

“If that’s so——” said Lady Gwyn, rising. She was glad enough of an excuse to escape from the hot room into the comparative coolness of the night air. She took Phœbe’s arm and they went out together, Sir Rowland

following on their heels. Mabel and Horace lingered behind.

"You're sure you are not afraid of the dew, Lady Gwyn?" asked Phœbe as they stepped out upon the lawn.

"No, no, not in the least, my dear," replied Lady Gwyn.

The gay lanterns swung in the faint wind, lighting up the garden. Out from the shadow of some bushes near at hand five manly figures suddenly emerged and stood—the figures of Joshua Sharp, Girdleberry, and the three detectives. Buttle was slightly in advance. The light shone full on his face. Lady Gwyn gazed and was suddenly overcome.

"I—I think I will go in again, dear," she said, turning to Phœbe with a gesture of wild helplessness.

Phœbe murmured her surprise and

distress and put her arm about Lady Gwyn.

"I'm so sorry," she said.

Joshua Sharp pushed forward. Phœbe saw that his face was grey and drawn, that his hands trembled and his head seemed palsied.

"These gentlemen are Cook's tourists who have missed their party," said he, affecting an airiness of manner which sat ill upon him.

Sir Rowland put on his eyeglass.

"The burglar fellows, by Jove!" he exclaimed.

Buttle turned to him at once.

"Very pleased to meet you, sir," he said.

Sir Rowland inclined his head doubtfully.

"Beautiful place, Berona, sir," Buttle went on. "Perfect paradise, sir!"

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Sir Rowland had by this time decided that this was a man he could not know.

"I am glad it meets with your approval," he remarked. Seeing that Buttle still regarded him oddly, he added: "I think, sir, we have never met before."

"Sorry to say we haven't," said Buttle.

Sir Rowland addressed himself to the ladies.

"Come," said Sharp to the detectives, "I'm sure you and your friends must want some refreshment. Let me take you in."

"Thank you, I am a bit dry," said Buttle. Still, he hesitated. He drew Joshua Sharp aside. "I suppose it will be all right leaving him out here for a bit?" he asked anxiously.

"Of course, of course," answered

Joshua Sharp. "This way, gentlemen."

They walked slowly toward the house. Buttle looked over his shoulder in the direction of Sir Rowland Gwyn. The baronet had moved away and Lady Gwyn was now standing where he had stood. Her face, turned toward Buttle, was clearly outlined in the light of the swinging lanterns. Buttle stopped at sight of her and stared.

"Well, I'm blow'd!" he whispered.

"Eh?" cried Sharp, stopping too.
"What was that?"

"Nothing, sir. I was saying that I feel quite blown after the walk up this here incline."

They resumed their advance upon the house. On the threshold they encountered Horace and Mabel, coming out.

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"Hullo!" cried Horace, gazing in surprise at the three detectives, whom he immediately recognized.

"These gentlemen are Cook's tourists who have lost their party," said Joshua Sharp, repeating the lie in a dull, tired voice. "They are strangers to Berona, so—remembering a Scriptural injunction—I have taken them in." As he made this joke—the sly humour of which he alone could fully appreciate—his voice quickened into gaiety of tone, and his eyes twinkled.

"Oh!" said Horace.

They passed into the house. Horace rubbed his chin moodily.

"That's quaint!" he said. "Come along, Mabel."

They crossed the garden.

"Shall we sit down here?" asked Mabel, halting at the first small table.

Sir Rowland called out : " Come along, you young people."

But Phœbe whispered in his ear :

" Oh no, Sir Rowland, they'll enjoy themselves much better over there."

And Sir Rowland chuckled.

Horace and Mabel sat down and their heads drew close together over the table.

" May I ?" asked he, producing a cigarette.

" Oh, do," said Mabel.

Horace leaned back and lit his cigarette. Meeting Mabel's eyes he smiled brightly, for just now he was full of the joy of life. Mabel smiled with quick responsiveness. Perhaps the beauty of the night had infected even these two weary philanderers. It was a very beautiful night. The air was heavy with a burden of sweet

odours and soft murmurings. Above was the sublime mystery of the heavens, glowing with great stars that were not as English stars, flat on an opaque sky, but luminous, seeming to float in the great spaces, waxing and waning.

"How I do hate the ubiquitous tourist!" said Sir Rowland testily, as the detectives disappeared into the house. "One meets him everywhere." He stopped to puff lustily at the cigar he had just lighted. "He has chased me right round the world. And now it seems that even Berona is not sacred from him."

He placed chairs for the ladies. Phœbe sat down immediately, but Lady Gwyn still stood with her head averted. She seemed unconscious of what was passing. She had overcome her inclination to faint and was

as anxious now to remain in the garden as she had been, a moment since, to go indoors.

"How funny that we should have mistaken them for policemen!" said Phœbe. "Come, Lady Gwyn," she added.

Lady Gwyn started and put her hand to her side, smiling wanly. Sir Rowland glared at her; he had an impression that she contemplated a "scene."

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" he cried impatiently. "Why don't you sit down?"

Lady Gwyn sank into a chair.

"I'm afraid Lady Gwyn isn't very well, Sir Rowland," said Phœbe gently. "Wouldn't you really rather come indoors?"

"No, no, my dear," exclaimed Lady Gwyn, in great affright. "I

think the air may do me good. I won't go in."

There was an interval of silence. Slowly the exceeding beauty of the night grew upon them, till even Sir Rowland became visibly affected.

"How rosy life looks after dinner," he said. "A good dinner is the only thing that reconciles me to my unfortunate lot."

Phœbe laughed softly.

"You're just a dear old colossal humbug, Sir Rowland," she said, with sudden daring, "and I don't believe in you one bit. You're ever so much nicer than you pretend to be, I'm sure."

He turned to her with an amused expression of face.

"Well, well, perhaps I am," he said carelessly, and laughed.

The appearance of a servant carry-

ing coffee caused a diversion. Sir Rowland said some obvious things about the sugar and women which seemed to borrow a spice of originality from the night. He was hugely pleased with himself and chuckled mightily. At the other table there had been silence for a great while.

"You are very quiet, Horace," said Mabel, at length.

Horace roused himself.

"The fumes of dinner are clogging my brain," he said languidly. "How nauseous this perpetual guzzling does become!"

Mabel said moodily :

"There are men who always seem to have just dined."

"I have noticed it," said Horace.

The lean figure of the native servant hovered over them with the coffee-tray. His white teeth flashed.

"Cof-fee?" he murmured, with his head held aside.

"Not for me, thank you," said Mabel.

He turned to Horace.

"Cof-fee?"

Horace nodded and took a cup. Mabel seized the sugar-basin.

"Let me," she said, laughing.

"Thank you," Horace murmured tenderly. "Two pieces, please."

As the servant moved away he caught at her hand and held it. She surrendered it to him.

"Ah!" she cried, gazing upward to the sky. "If only all love were like ours—content to exist without gross expression."

"Love is the only secret one can share with a woman," said Horace.

Mabel's smooth brows contracted.

"How unworthy of you, Horace!"

she cried. "I thought only the inferior male things ever disparaged women."

"Mabel," said Horace, his pale face lighting up in his earnestness, "you are the embodiment to me of all true womanhood." She thrilled with a feeling of delicious content. "But the best of women are imperfect."

"Nothing is perfect," faltered Mabel.

"Except this little hand," said Horace, touching her fingers with his lips.

She became suddenly self-conscious and abashed. She drew her hand away, blushing.

"Horace, how could you?" she cried. "How could I let you? We might be people in a novelette!"

She rose hastily and ran away into the darkness. Horace pursued her among the bushes. She flitted before

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him like a fair, white spirit of the garden.

Joshua Sharp and Girdleberry had plied the detectives with wine until those worthy men grew inflated with undue ideas of their importance, and floated away into the high, rare atmosphere of self-sufficiency.

"It's grand to be alive, it is," proclaimed Buttle after the fifth glass of champagne. "I wouldn't be dead, I wouldn't, not for fourpence."

"You're not drinking, Mr. Mears," said the obsequious Girdleberry. "Let me fill your glass."

Cowrie sang :

"Let the pannikin pass,
We care not for glass.
Heigh-ho ! roll the man down !
In grog that is strong
And a jolly good song
Heigh-ho ! roll the man down !"

“ Bravo, Mr. Cowrie!” cried Sharp. “ Now the next verse.”

“ The next verse!” echoed Cowrie.
“ It goes like this :

“ ‘ The mainbrace we’ll splice,
My boys, in a trice!
Heigh-ho! roll the man down! ’ ”

“ Shut up, you fool!” said Mears.
“ Can’t you remember yourself, eh?”

“ I remember, I remember the house where I was born,” replied Cowrie inconsequently. “ Don’t you interfere with me.”

Buttle pushed away the insidious Girdleberry, who was about to fill his glass for the sixth time.

“ No, no,” he said, rising. “ Duty’s duty and must be done. Cowrie—Mears!”

“ You wish to retire to your bedroom?” insinuated Joshua Sharp.

"No, I don't," said Buttle. "I wish to go out into the garden, where my prisoner is. None of your tricks, you know, Sir Rowland."

Joshua Sharp flushed with anger at the detective's coarse familiarity.

"Do as you please," he said coldly, "so long as you respect my wishes and wait until Sir—Mr. Sharp is off these premises before arresting him."

"I'll see to it," said Buttle, with official brevity. "Come, Cowrie—Mears!"

The muddled trio rose and stumbled into the garden. Sharp and Girdleberry followed them closely.

Sir Rowland was explaining a theory in sociology to Phœbe. He stopped abruptly as the detectives appeared.

"Here come these tourist bounders again," he said, sniffing the air. "I wonder why tourists always use so

much hair-oil? They positively *soil* the atmosphere." He sniffed again in high dudgeon.

" Make yourselves at home, gentlemen," Sharp was saying. " Try these cigars."

He extended his case to Buttle.

" Thank you, sir," said the detective. " Don't mind if I do."

He advanced toward the table where Sir Rowland sat. Phœbe rose at once and moved away to join Mabel, who at that moment emerged from the shadow of the bushes, closely accompanied by Horace.

" I see you're a smoker, sir," said Buttle, addressing Sir Rowland. " Well, there's nothing like it, eh ? "

" I suppose not. I find it such a good disinfectant," said the baronet, with acrid emphasis.

He followed the example of Phœbe

and rose too. The two girls had gone off together, leaving Horace disconsolate and alone. Sir Rowland took his son's arm.

"What a detestable, vulgar fellow that is!" he said, indicating Buttler.

"I always find the lower orders so delightfully unexpected," said Horace.

"Yes, he's very unexpected or I wouldn't have come here at all to-day."

Joshua Sharp, with Girdleberry at his elbow, stood surveying the scene with some anxiety. He could not but be aware that his mixture of guests was explosive. Nothing of his anxiety appeared on his face, however. He was outwardly calm and unperturbed—the serene philosopher!

"The close of the day, like the evening of life, should be devoted to contemplation and repose," he ob-

served loudly. "I feel that I could live in this peaceful atmosphere for ever, content, henceforth, to forego all empty vanities and the rude unrest of bustling cities!"

He sat down and murmured to Girdleberry :

"We must leave here in an hour—if possible."

Girdleberry nodded and answered under his breath :

"The trunks are being packed. The train goes at 9.46."

Sharp glanced at his watch. Lest this action should have its due significance for either of the detectives, he yawned.

"Ah, nearly two hours!" he said.

CHAPTER X.

HEADWAY.

LADY GWYN sat alone at the little table, her chin in her palm, her foolish, kind face drooping over her cup. The pungent odour of the coffee was in her nostrils sickening her; but she did not move her head. She paid no heed to the idle chatter about her; it buzzed in her ears with no sort of significance. In all the world there was no sadder woman than Lady Gwyn that night; for hers was the sadness of defeated sentimentalism. She felt cold and lonely. Her life seemed an empty, vain thing. She hated her pompous husband and his wilted offspring, Horace; she hated

the suave Sharp and his factotum, Girdleberry ; she hated the two fine misses, Phœbe and Mabel ; most of all, she hated herself. The light of her life was gone out ; yet it would be interesting to speculate on the part played in the tragedy by the muffins that she had consumed at tea. That repose of mind which should always follow muffins had been tragically interrupted.

At length, she rose forlornly and gazed about her. She saw her old lover, Bob Buttle, a yard away, standing with his legs crossed and his back against a tree. She fancied he had been watching her, but his face was averted now : she caught the outline of it through the cloud of smoke enveloping his head. She hesitated, with her hand on the back of her chair, and gazed about appre-

hensively. Her husband had gone off with his son into the misty distance; Mabel and Phœbe were indoors; Cowrie and Mears whispered at a table, apart; Joshua Sharp and Girdleberry were earnestly engaged in conversation. The moment was opportune. She went up to Buttle and touched his elbow.

“Bob!” she whispered.

He turned, waving away the circling smoke with his hand. He regarded her sternly.

“Madam?” he said icily.

“Oh, Bob, how can you speak to me like that?” she exclaimed, at the point of tears.

Buttle flicked the ash from his cigar.

“You haven’t forgot me altogether, then?” he remarked.

“Women never forget love’s young

dream, like men do," exclaimed Lady Gwyn.

" You forgot it easy enough once," sneered Buttle.

" Oh ! " cried Lady Gwyn, catching her breath.

Buttle went on brutally :

" Which of these old buffers is your capture ? "

Lady Gwyn wrestled with her contending emotions. At last, she contrived to gasp out :

" Don't speak so cruel to me, Bob. Oh, don't."

" Which is it ? " asked Buttle. " Mr. Joshua Sharp, or the other old buffer ? "

" What does that matter now ? " said Lady Gwyn, sighing. " We are separated for ever."

Buttle snorted.

" Well, you ought to ha' waited

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for me, Martha," he said. "It's your own fault."

"That's the worst part of it. I wouldn't mind so much—I don't know why!—if anybody else was to blame."

"Ah, I've got on in the world since you threw me over!"

"I always thought you would, dear."

"None o' that. I've done with love. Love's rubbish, that's what it is. It pulls a man down. Look at me. Look how love interfered with my duty. I was only half a policeman and half a man. A sort o' composite blend, neither one thing nor the other. *Now*—well, there's no more blue tunics and helmets for me. I'm Inspector Buttle of the Detective, I am, not a common policeman."

"Oh, Bob, if I'd only known!" cried Lady Gwyn. "But you know I always soared 'igh."

"And I wasn't 'igh enough for you. Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk—unless you're a milk-man and short of water. We must make the best of things, that's all. We've both got promotion. I suppose we must be satisfied wi' that."

Nevertheless, he spoke with all the bitterness of a disillusioned man.

Lady Gwyn perceived suddenly that the eyes of Joshua Sharp and Girdleberry were upon her.

"They're watching us," she said agitatedly. "Don't give me away, Bob, will you?"

"So you're ashamed of your old love, are you?" cried Buttle.

Joshua Sharp now approached them. Buttle moved to meet him.

"Ah, Mr. Buttle," he cried in his genial way, clapping the detective on

the shoulder, "making friends with the ladies, I see."

"Yes, sir," said Buttles.

"Ah, the women, the women!" murmured Sharp playfully. "We all run after them, don't we?"

He passed on to Lady Gwyn. Her eyes drooped before his curious gaze and she trembled. She feared he was about to question her; but he did not. He merely smiled and said, with a courtly bow, in which (or so it seemed to her) there was a faint suggestion of irony:

"Come, come, the conversation can't get on without a lady, and my girls seem to have run away altogether."

Meanwhile, Buttles had gone over to Cowrie and Mears.

"Look here, you fellows," he said, "you seem to be half asleep."

"Mears is the half that's asleep," said Cowrie.

"Me!" cried Mears, indignantly starting up wide-eyed. "I ain't nothink o' the sort. What do you mean?"

"You know there's important work to be done to-night," pursued Buttle.

"Very important, I should say," said Cowrie, winking. "You seemed to be doing it all right over there—wi' the lady."

Buttle could not resist this appeal to his vanity. He abated the rigour of his manner and chuckled.

"Go on with you!" he exclaimed. "On the strict q.t., though," he added, "I *did* make some headway—*some!* Enough, anyhow, to get a rise out of Sir Rowland. I believe he's quite jealous of me already."

"Ah!" said Cowrie, pandering

shamelessly to Buttle's weakness, "but you've got such a way with you, sir. You really ought to be careful," he added, more seriously.

"Yes, yes," said Buttle, with lofty complacency; "I think I know the sex pretty well. But I must keep my eyes on our man. I don't half like delaying things."

Horace had forsaken his father and gone into the house after the girls. Sir Rowland was just then selecting a fresh cigar from his bulky case. Buttle strode toward him.

"Take a light off this, sir," he said familiarly.

Sir Rowland raised his head.

"Thank you, no," he said. "The one luxury in which I most revel is a match all to myself."

He shook himself free of Buttle and walked stiffly away to examine a

flower-bed through his glass. Buttle paused a moment, then followed him. Sir Rowland was stooping to pluck a magnificent blue lily when the breath of the detective warmed his neck.

“Wonderful growth of flowers in Berona, sir!” said Buttle.

Sir Rowland started up and moved away again.

“You think so, Mr. Buttle?” he said.

“Damn your eyes, you old villain!” Buttle muttered. “I’ll make you pay for this.”

Horace, having searched the house vainly, was out in the garden again, and in earnest conversation with Joshua Sharp. Sir Rowland joined them.

“I say, you mustn’t let Horace bore you with his half-baked opinions about things,” he said, addressing Sharp.

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"I have no opinions," returned Horace. "I know."

"Ah!" cried Sharp. "What sweet complacency! It is only given to the very young to know. We old fogies are hampered by experience."

Ever, as he spoke, his eyes were searching the darkness anxiously.

"Talking about experience," began Buttle, coming up.

Sir Rowland uttered a muffled oath.

"I shall leave this place to-morrow," he said testily.

"Then you will achieve the impossible," said Horace. "Let me be there when it is done."

"Ah, ah, that's rather true!" cried Buttle.

Sir Rowland turned on him with such fierceness that the detective was put out of countenance altogether.

“What do you know about it, sir?” demanded Sir Rowland.

“Yes,” echoed Sharp, taking his cue from the baronet, “what do you know about it?”

“No offence, no offence, gentlemen,” said Buttle, aghast at the storm he had raised. “I was merely thinking of the railway arrangements.”

“We don’t arrange things in Berona—they happen,” said Horace. “Even our trains are playfully irresponsible.”

“It’s simply barbarous the way the railway carries on here,” interposed Sir Rowland, who always discounted Horace’s flippancy with a burst of earnestness. “One train a week, and sometimes not that. No telegraph, no anything.”

“And you get your letters when the

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postman happens to be down your way," added Sharp.

"But he's such a picturesque loafer one can forgive him anything," said Horace.

"I knew a man once——" began Buttle nervously.

But Sir Rowland interrupted him again.

"There are some men who ought to be an export from every country," he said, with heavy emphasis.

Embarrassment was in the air. Joshua Sharp threw an anxious glance toward the now incensed detective and remarked, throwing out his meagre chest :

"How I thrill at the word 'country'! Ah, you may say what you like, but patriotism is a beautiful thing."

"Bosh, bosh, my dear sir!" exclaimed Sir Rowland. "Patriotism is

merely an aggravated form of egotism. A man's conceit of himself gets too big for his body and he says, '*My* country,' meaning the country as embodied in *ME*!"

"Ah, no!" said Sharp. "You cannot be sincere. I won't believe it. Patriotism is *not* what you say. To die for one's country! How glorious! The true National Debt of England is a million heroes' lives!"

Sir Rowland said "Phsaw!" and moved away.

"I hate that kind of talk," he muttered.

Just then, Horace caught sight of Phœbe and Mabel coming from the house with arms intertwined and heads together. He forsook Joshua Sharp instantly, without even the empty formality of an apology, and

joined the girls. Phœbe disengaged herself from Mabel at once and ran away.

“How foolish of her!” said Horace.
“That means, how feminine!”

Mabel let the implied challenge pass.

“I am horribly anxious,” she announced. “And I want to speak to you.”

She bit her lip.

“Well?” asked Horace.

Still she hesitated.

“Look!” she cried suddenly, pointing into the darkness.

“Where?” asked Horace, impressed by her demeanour.

“There!”

He looked and saw a strange, top-heavy shadow moving through the gloomy distance.

“What is it?” he whispered.

"It's one of the servants carrying a box," answered Mabel. "Hush!"

There was a rattle of harness and the whinnying of a horse.

"There's a cart at the gate," Mabel went on, "and the servants are loading it with boxes."

"I can't understand it," Horace said. "I have fancied all along that there's something in the wind. Look! There goes another box."

"Hush!" said Mabel. "I will tell you what is happening, but you must promise to keep it secret."

"Mabel!"

"You must promise. It is so terribly important."

He promised. They drew apart, and she began to talk to him very softly and earnestly. What she told him brought a long, shrill whistle of dismay to his lips.

CHAPTER XI.

BUMPTIOUS WAYS.

“ MY DEAR ! ”

Phœbe started from a reverie to find her father at her elbow.

“ Oh, papa, how you startled me ! ” she cried.

She looked at him ; there was a curious expression of shame upon his face.

“ Phœbe,” he said, “ you have always been a good dutiful girl. Will you give me your unquestioning obedience to-night ? ”

“ Of course, papa.”

“ Then go at once and pack up your trinkets.”

She stared at him.

"Why, papa?" she asked.

"S-sh!" he whispered fearfully.

"My dear, it would be no use my explaining. You wouldn't understand. I'm called away on business."

"I thought you had given up all that, papa?"

"I haven't. Now, hurry," he said.

"We must leave Berona by the train to-night. We are going over the border."

"But, papa——"

"Do as I tell you, like a good girl," said Sharp, firmly but tenderly. "I'll explain to you afterwards. And don't say a word to any one about our departure. It's—it's very important—a matter of thousands of pounds."

"But I don't understand, papa," faltered Phœbe.

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"Look at the sky!" cried Sharp.
"See how the stars——"

"The stars are too far away," said Sir Rowland. "I prefer to keep my thoughts nearer earth." Nevertheless, he looked up. "I grant you," he said, "that the sky is beautiful enough. No man could ignore that fact. It is easier to ignore what is under the sky—the misery and poverty and pestilence of cities. The——"

"I prefer to think, on a night like this, that every one is happy," said Joshua Sharp. "It is so much less disturbing. Thoughts of misery and poverty and pestilence should be reserved for the English fireside in winter; then, when the crackling of the fire within mingles with the voice of the storm without, it is pleasant to contemplate the horrors

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you speak of. I verily believe that such evils are permitted to exist solely for the sake of contrast."

"You are talking heartless nonsense," said Sir Rowland. "I forgive you, because I know you don't mean what you say."

"The things that are meant are never said," remarked Girdleberry. "They are done."

Sir Rowland suspected an underlying sneer.

"Very true, Mr. Girdleberry," he said. "You will be pleased to hear that I return to England very shortly."

"Pleased! Oh no!"

"To do those things, I mean," continued Sir Rowland.

"You're not going to leave Berona, surely?" cried Sharp.

"Yes. I've quite made up my mind. I shan't stay here any longer.

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I can't stand it." He looked toward Buttle.

The detective drew nearer to them and asked mildly :

" Climate disagree with you, sir?"

" No, not the climate," answered Sir Rowland testily.

A silence fell on them like a wet blanket.

" So you're thinking of going back to England, sir?" said Buttle, at last. " Well, England will no doubt be very glad to see you."

" Gladder than I, I daresay," said Sir Rowland.

" Ah, indeed," said Buttle.

" England is no place for a man who loves freedom and justice. But my duty is there, and I go," said Sir Rowland, with the air of a Christian father.

" England has certain drawbacks,"

began Girdleberry, but Sharp checked him.

“Never!” he cried enthusiastically. “What! England? That land of the brave and the free, where everybody does as he likes and—and whom he likes; where there is one law for the rich and five hundred for the poor; where everybody talks about Heaven as if he were on the Committee of Management.”

“A played-out country, sir!” thundered Sir Rowland in his best platform manner; “overrun by dunder-headed Jacks-in-office—with a policeman at every street corner to look after the national morality!”

“You both seem to have a grudge against the old country,” said Buttle, his moist eye twinkling.

“I?” cried Sharp. “Oh no! I am not one of your social hedgehogs

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—no offence. I believe in adapting oneself to one's surroundings. It would never do for me to quarrel with English institutions : something might take me back at any time and keep me there for years. And"—his left eyelid lowered, almost imperceptibly—"after all, I think I do owe my countrymen something."

A chuckle came out of the darkness. Everybody looked toward Girdleberry, but his gravity was tremendous.

" Seems to me—" began Buttle, laying his hand on Sir Rowland's arm.

Sir Rowland drew his arm away.

" Oh, oh !" he gasped angrily. He choked down his spleen. " I think I'll be going now," he said. " I'll go indoors and get my hat and coat."

" Oh, don't go yet," cried Sharp, who foresaw dire consequences of the baronet's departure.

"I—I have some rather important letters to write. I must go," he said. He turned away and whispered in Sharp's ear: "I can't stand this fellow, and I do wish you were not so cursedly hospitable!"

Joshua Sharp shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder where my wife is?" said Sir Rowland, looking about. "I haven't seen her for some time."

"*His* wife! She is his wife then," thought Buttle. "Poor Martha! Well, it's a judgment on her, that's all."

Sir Rowland moved off, calling out: "Martha, Martha!"

Lady Gwyn emerged from the shadow of a tree, answering faintly, "Yes, dear," and they went into the house together.

Buttle turned to Sharp.

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"He's trying to give me the slip, sir," he said. "But Bob Buttle wasn't born yesterday. I ain't a-going to let him out o' my sight to-night."

He, too, moved toward the house.

"A moment, Mr. Buttle!" cried Sharp.

"Yes, sir."

"Mind, he's not to be arrested in this house."

"I'll try to keep my hands off him, sir," said Buttle sullenly, "but he do make me so wild with his bumptious ways. I'm simply itching to get the darbies on him."

"It's beastly unpleasant," said Sharp. "I can't see why you shouldn't arrest him to-morrow at his own house."

"Bless your innocent heart, sir!" said Buttle. "You don't know what a wily old fox that there Joshua Sharp

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is. Why, sir, if he'd had any suspicion of who I was he'd ha' given me the slip by now. And I ain't so sure that he don't tumble," he added, somewhat inconsistently. "I must go after him."

"Oh, how I wish you could temper justice with mercy," said Sharp. "If you would only contrive not to capture him he might reform."

"That's all very well, but it wouldn't do," said Buttle sagely.

"Couldn't you contrive to lose him for — Come, Mr. Buttle, you're a man of sense." He buttonholed the detective. "I'll give you £20," he said, "if you'll wait till to-morrow."

"Sir Rowland, I'm surprised at you."

"I meant to say £50. I beg your pardon."

"I couldn't think of it."

"Yes, do think of it. I appeal to you as a friend. I feel I ought to have known you years ago. Give him another chance. It isn't for his sake so much. If he has sinned he should be punished, of course ; there's nothing mawkish about me. It's for the sake of his innocent, trusting wife and——"

"Say no more," said Buttle loftily. "It ain't no good. Your feelings is carrying you off your balance. It ain't likely I'd take a bribe. What ! Me ! No, duty's duty, and must be done. Besides, there's a reward of a thousand out for him !"

"Ah !" gasped Joshua Sharp.

Buttle hurried toward the house. From behind he had a very stiff-necked appearance ; his demeanour was due to his mood of exaltation

So high above the earth was he that he did not see Girdleberry approaching and they collided. He apologized, but haughtily.

“Here, Girdleberry, Girdleberry!” cried Sharp.

Girdleberry detected a note of panic in his master’s voice. He cried out, “Yes, sir,” and hastened toward him.

A few of the lanterns had blown out or guttered down. The light was now faint. Everything seemed curiously foreshortened in the gloom. Thus it happened that Girdleberry, hastening forward in his short-sighted fashion, stumbled against Cowrie and Mears, who were still sitting at their table, apparently asleep. The two men sat up suddenly and Cowrie murmured :

“Don’t mention it, sir.”

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"I didn't," said Girdleberry, who had barked his shin.

"Did you hear that?" grunted Mears. "He said, 'I didn't!' Didn't mention it, he means! Well, there's a pretty gentleman for you!"

Girdleberry joined Sharp, and they paced the lawn together.

"Is everything ready?" asked Sharp. "This fool is getting troublesome. I wonder what the issue will be?"

"There's a trinity of fools, sir," said Girdleberry, remembering his barked shin.

"A fool, multiplied by three, is nearly a wise man, sometimes," said Sharp. "A colony of fools makes a nation," he reflected, "and without nations there would be no D.U.M.'s, eh?"

"What a wonderful man you are!"

cried Girdleberry, lost in admiration.
"You are like a great general, sir,
jesting on the field of battle."

"Do you know, Girdleberry," said Sharp, "I almost enjoy this sort of thing—this game of baffle. It's like playing cards for high stakes or fencing with a man. It exhilarates me!"

"But you must be careful!"

"I believe we shall get out of it. We have been in worse predicaments and escaped. Why not now?"

Nevertheless, Girdleberry thought he still detected a note of panic in Joshua Sharp's voice. They paced to and fro, conferring in whispers.

Horace and Mabel passed them.

"Aha!" said Sharp genially.

"See!" said Horace, looking back.

"The robbers in council!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Mabel.

They came near to Cowrie and Mears.

Mears was speaking.

"What I say is this," he observed, "there don't seem to be nothing suspicious about him!"

"Well," growled Cowrie, "ain't that suspicious enough for you?"

"Let us talk to these men of earth," whispered Horace. "They may serve to distract our mind for a little."

"They seem to be putting the world in order," said Mabel.

Together, they approached the detectives. Horace addressed them.

"May I inquire what matter of state you are discussing?" he asked, with a bland smile.

"Eh?" queried Cowrie.

"Look here, sir," said Mears, with all the eagerness of a man worsted in argument to appeal to a third

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party, "my friend here is a man with a theory."

"Go slow," muttered Cowrie.

"How interesting!" cried Mabel.

"He says," continued Mears, "that if there ain't nothink suspicious about a man he's generally an out-and-out wrong 'un. Now, I ask you, is that common sense?"

"I hope not," replied Horace. "Common sense repels me. It is the fool's footrule by which he would measure life!"

"I don't think you quite understand, sir," said Cowrie impatiently. "Look here, it's like this: I maintain that every man has something to conceal—something he's ashamed of. And it don't matter whether he shows it or not, there it is."

"How beautifully lucid!" cried Mabel. "But oh! how obvious!"

"I am afraid we can do nothing for them," said Horace sadly.

"Bloke's barmy, ain't he?" said Mears to Cowrie.

"I expect he's one o' them there barmy clever 'blokes," said Cowrie. "He's just the barmy clever age. It seems a sort o' disease with swells that about half of 'em has to go through for a cert—like measles with us."

At this juncture Sir Rowland and Lady Gwyn appeared. Over the shoulder of Sir Rowland the face of Buttle was clearly visible. Lady Gwyn wore a huge hat with drooping brim. Sir Rowland was struggling into his overcoat as he crossed the lawn.

"Allow me, sir," ventured Buttle.

Sir Rowland turned on him in a white fury.

"Why the devil do you follow me about like this?" he cried savagely. "I tell you I have no immediate intention of parting from my present valet. Go away!"

His angry voice rang clearly. Sharp and Girdleberry cowered together. Horace felt Mabel's hand tighten on his arm.

"It's coming—coming—coming!" she whispered. "Oh, Horace! Oh, God! Poor little Phibs!"

For a moment Buttle was silent; then his lips puffed out, his nostrils dilated, his eyes rolled.

"This is too much!" he said between his teeth.

Sir Rowland surveyed him contemptuously.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" he demanded. "How dare you address me like that! How

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dare you address me at all! Why can't you go away, sir?"

"Oh, Bob!" cried Lady Gwyn, wringing her hands. "Oh, I shall die!"

"Cowrie—Mears!" cried Buttle.

"Yes, sir."

The two men rose and closed in about Sir Rowland. He looked from one to the other.

"Mr. Buttle, please remember," Sharp faltered.

"I've had quite enough of it, thank you," said Buttle grimly.

"What the devil do you mean by this conduct?" roared Sir Rowland, glaring at the three men.

"I'll show you what I mean," said Buttle. "Secure your prisoner."

Cowrie and Mears seized Sir Rowland. Lady Gwyn was knocked aside. The old baronet struggled

manfully, but the vigour of his youth was gone.

Sharp interposed.

"Mr. Buttle," he cried shrilly, "I can't have this.

"It is unbearable," said Horace, coming forward.

"Horace, for Heaven's sake," whispered Mabel, clutching his arm. He stopped.

Sir Rowland was on the ground with the two detectives bent over him.

"You get out of the way, sir," said Buttle, pushing back Sharp.

The detectives ceased struggling with Sir Rowland. He arose. The handcuffs gleamed on his wrists. He stood, looking down at them with haggard eyes, spent with exhaustion; half-dazed by the very exuberance of his own anger.

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Buttle, confronting him, sternly cried :

“ Joshua Sharp, I arrest you in the Queen's name on a charge of fraud and embezzlement, and I warn you that anything you may now say will be used in evidence against you.”

Lady Gwyn shrieked, reeled, tottered. Buttle caught her, fainting, in his arms.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE DARK.

A LONG pause ensued—it was such a pause as follows a clap of thunder. One swinging lantern suddenly caught fire and, blazing high, lighted up the garden with a ruddy glow ; it fell, whirling in the wind, and scattered in a rain of red ashes on the lawn. The darkness seemed to thicken with the extinction of the last spark ; the silence grew more intense. Again the dog asked plaintively :

“ How—how—how ? ”

And the black trees answered with a sigh.

The heavy breathing of Sir

Rowland was clearly audible. He stood as if stunned, his head hanging, with Cowrie and Mears on either side of him. Lady Gwyn still reposed in the arms of Buttle; the detective looked very much embarrassed and slightly foolish—the woman had robbed the episode of half its dramatic fitness. Girdleberry and Sharp were huddled together, their white frightened faces in close proximity. Horace and Mabel stood somewhat apart.

Suddenly a wistful voice sounded through the stillness :

“ Papa ! ”

Joshua Sharp started and turned his face toward the house.

“ Papa ! What has happened ? ”

“ Nothing much, my dear,” answered Sharp huskily. “ Don’t come out. Stay in the house.”

There was a faint murmured protest,

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then followed the rattle of a closing window.

“Poor little Phibs!” murmured Mabel.

Horace stirred. He advanced a pace.

“I say, you!” he cried, addressing Buttle.

Mabel whispered in a frenzy of apprehension:

“No, no, no. Horace, don’t speak. Don’t interfere. Don’t think. Come away with me. At once. Do. Please.”

“That’s nonsense, Mabel,” said Horace. “I’m not going to see the guv’nor ill-treated like this.” He spoke softly.

“It will break Phœbe’s heart,” cried Mabel. “Oh, dear, dear Horace, *please* don’t interfere! Come away. Just listen to me for a moment.”

He was shaken with doubt. He looked at Mabel. He should not have done that. Her eyes pleaded to him dumbly ; in them was expressed all the true wealth of her love for him. He became as wax in her hands. He forgot his father—everything ; he could only gaze and wonder. He suffered himself to be led away. They walked twenty yards and then he stopped, overcome with new shame.

“ Mabel, I must go back,” he said.

She caught him in her arms and held him.

“ You shan’t go back,” she said.
“ You must listen to me first.”

“ I’m behaving like a perfect cad,” he muttered. “ I can’t bear it.”

“ The shame is mine. I want to save Phibs. Remember what I told you. So long as the mistake is kept

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up there is a chance for her father to escape. Think. The train goes in an hour. You wouldn't set an hour's discomfort against the happiness of Phœbe's whole life."

"But—" he cried.

"I ask you to do it for me. If you hurt Phœbe you hurt me too." She grew inarticulate. "You pretended to love me, Horace!" she sobbed, sinking down upon a rough bench and covering her face with her hands.

"Mabel!" he cried, sitting down beside her.

"You will do this for me, Horace dear?"

"I will do what you like," he said.

They sat there whilst the rest of the drama was played out on the lawn.

"Here, Cowrie—Mears!" cried

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Buttle, suddenly finding his voice.
"Take this woman into the house."

Mears looked toward Sharp.

"Into the house?" he stammered.

"Take her anywhere—I don't care where it is," said Buttle.

"Yes," said Sharp, raising himself.
"Take her into the house. Put her in the blue room. The servants will tell you which that is. My daughter's there. She will attend to her."

Buttle handed Lady Gwyn over to Cowrie, who half-dragged, half-carried her toward the house. He had to deposit her on the lawn once, whilst he mopped his brow and recovered his breath; for Lady Gwyn was only light of temperament: her body, like her mind, was material enough. Ever and anon she murmured, "Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob!" which set Cowrie to thinking.

"Which is the blue room?" he asked a servant on the threshold.

"Room," cried the black, with a smile of great amiability.

"Yes, you black fool—room!" repeated Cowrie. "The blue room! The Oxford and Cambridge indigo navy blue room!"

The black was quite unperturbed by this display of irritation. He nodded even more amiably and laughed outright.

"Blue room? Yes," he said.

He led the detective through a number of handsome apartments till they came to a locked door at which he knocked. The pale face of Phœbe looked out.

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried.

"Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob!" murmured Lady Gwyn.

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"She will go on like that, miss," said Cowrie, grinning and blushing. "I can't help it."

"Please put her on the sofa. Halili," she said, addressing the black, "bring me some water—wat-ah!" He nodded. She turned again to Cowrie. "And ask my papa to come to me, please, if you don't mind," she said.

"Yes, miss."

Cowrie lingered a moment.

"That is all," she said. "Thank you."

"Is there anything I can do before I go, miss?"

"I think not, thank you. You will send my papa to me."

"Certainly, miss."

He withdrew. As he approached the group on the lawn, Sir Rowland Gwyn was saying :

"I tell you I won't be taken away. I'm going to stop here till my wife is better."

"Let him stay," pleaded Sharp.

Sir Rowland looked at him, half smiling. In the struggle he had bruised his head and he was not yet absolute master of himself.

"I have been cruelly outraged," he said; "and I will not put up with it. Everybody concerned shall smart for this, let me tell you. I will show no quarter. The law shall run its course."

"I ain't got any objection to his staying here for an hour or two, if you don't mind," said Buttle to Joshua Sharp. "It's just as you like. He's landed safe enough now."

"Poor fellow!" said Sharp.

"Thank you, thank you," murmured Sir Rowland.

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He was led into the house. Sharp and Girdleberry followed.

"Your daughter wants to see you, sir," said Cowrie to Sharp.

"I will go to her at once," said Sharp. "Girdleberry, you stay here—with—with the prisoner."

He hurried away to his daughter's room. There he found Lady Gwyn, recovered from her swoon, sitting on the sofa with disordered hair and starting eyes. Phoebe stood beside her, chafing her hands.

"Oh, dear Mr. Sharp," cried Lady Gwyn, starting up, as he entered, "please tell me."

"Hush!" he said gently. "Lie down. Don't speak. You are very seriously ill; you must not excite yourself."

"I must know——" she began shrilly.

Sharp awed her by a great display of gravity as he replied :

“ Oh, my dear Lady Gwyn, do *not* excite yourself. You have had a very dangerous seizure. The heart—the consequences may be so serious. You must not speak. You must try not to think, but just lie still and go to sleep, if you can. In an hour or two you will be better, no doubt ; but until then—Phœbe, prevail on Lady Gwyn.”

“ Yes,” said Phœbe, opening her blue eyes wide in horror. “ Yes, Lady Gwyn, do be careful. Papa always knows best.”

Poor Lady Gwyn was almost frightened to death. She curled up on the sofa, sobbing.

“ I will be very quiet,” she said. “ Oh, my head! What was it happened? Did it happen?”

“ Hush! hush!”

“Was it only a dream?”

“Yes, it was a dream,” said Joshua Sharp soothingly.

Lady Gwyn closed her eyes with a sigh.

“Was it a dream?” she murmured.

“It happened in the dark, didn’t it?”

“Hush! hush!” said Joshua Sharp again. He was feverishly anxious to get away from the room. So much might be happening downstairs whilst he was away. His head went whirling. What should he do next?

He beckoned his daughter aside.

“Phœbe,” he said, “remember what I told you—don’t leave this room. Whatever happens, stay here —like Casabianca.”

“Oh, papa!” cried the girl. “What is it that’s happened? All that confusion and shouting—and the silence afterwards?”

"Lady Gwyn had a horrible fit," he said. "She tried to run amuck—in a feminine sort of way. I doubt if she will ever recover her reason. You must pay no attention to what she says. She is quite mad for the time being."

"Must I stay here with her alone?" gasped Phœbe. "Where's Sir Rowland? Why doesn't he come and sit with her?"

"She has suddenly taken an unreasoning, mad dislike to him," said Sharp glibly. "You will be quite safe, my child. She will do you no harm, so long as you let her have her own way."

"I am afraid."

"No, no."

"Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob! Oh, Bob!" sighed Lady Gwyn.

Joshua Sharp raised his hands and shook his head dolefully.

"It is very, very sad," he said. "But I must go and look after Sir Rowland. He's frightfully upset. Remember, don't leave this room."

"No, papa," faltered Phœbe, bewildered beyond measure by her father's words and manner.

She returned to her seat beside Lady Gwyn and Joshua Sharp stole back to the room where he had left Sir Rowland.

On the threshold a great paroxysm of trembling seized him. All was still within. He could hear no sound. Hark! What was that? The movement of a foot? What if his feeble ruse (it seemed terribly feeble now to his shaken intelligence) had failed and the detectives were waiting behind that door to pounce on him as he entered? He drew back. He was tempted to run away blindly

into the wilderness. It seemed like courting destruction to stay there. Yet, to run away was worse folly. He would surely die of starvation or be eaten by beasts, even if he escaped the detectives—and it was not likely he would escape them, alone, without resource, in a barbarous land.

"Courage, Joshua Sharp," he whispered. "In an hour you will be miles away, if all goes well, and, at the worst, you can brazen it out."

He straightened himself and pushed open the door.

Sir Rowland Gwyn sat on a sofa between Cowrie and Mears. Buttle and Girdleberry were conversing in low tones at the window.

"Ah, Sir Rowland," said Buttle, touching a forelock as Sharp entered.

Sir Rowland looked up.

“Eh?” he said, startled out of his torpor.

Joshua Sharp felt that his heart had stopped beating. His mouth became dry and lathery. He saw, as in a dream, the face of Girdleberry grow white and hideous. With a mighty effort he spoke.

“How are you now, Mr. Sharp?” he asked Sir Rowland.

Sir Rowland stared.

“What?” he exclaimed. “What did you call me?”

“I asked how you were.”

“You addressed me by the name of Mr. Sharp. What does that mean?”

“Considering the disgraceful position in which you are now placed,” said Joshua Sharp coldly, “and that you have, throughout our acquaintance, concealed your true character from me, you can hardly expect me

to call you 'Joshua' any longer. It is impossible."

Sir Rowland's eyes bulged. He turned to Buttler.

"Am I mad? What does he mean?" he gasped hoarsely.

"You surely ain't going to try the mistaken identity dodge, are you?" cried Buttler disgustedly. "You know what he means very well."

"But I don't, I most emphatically don't," exclaimed Sir Rowland. "The whole thing, from beginning to end, is a complete mystery to me. Why am I suddenly attacked and handcuffed? Why am I made prisoner? Why do you address me by the name of that man there? Sharp, what does it mean?"

Joshua Sharp had turned away to address Girdleberry. He did not heed Sir Rowland's appeal.

"Mr. Sharp!" cried Sir Rowland.

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"Come, come," cried Buttle, recovering his breath, "you can't impose on me like that. I'm too old a bird."

Sir Rowland glared at him and from him to Sharp.

"Mr. Buttle," said Sharp, turning suddenly, "I cannot bear to listen to this. I must leave you with this creature. Come, Girdleberry."

They went out together. The eyes of Sir Rowland followed them to the door; but the brain of Sir Rowland was numb and chill with blank, awful bewilderment. He was at the point of idiocy. He wanted to shriek and tear his hair. He was stricken dumb and nerveless.

"What does it all mean? What does it mean?" he gasped, covering his face with his hands. "Am I going mad, or am I mad already?"

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"It means," said Buttle drily, "that you'll get fourteen years."

Sir Rowland continued to hide his face in his hands. He was struggling to retrace his way, step by step, through the events of the evening.

Joshua Sharp led Girdleberry into the garden.

"It was awful!" he said. "I felt like a man in a dream. I had to come out. I should have broken down. How did I do it?"

"It was wonderful, wonderful!" said Girdleberry.

"An insane longing to laugh came over me. I suppose I have become a bit hysterical. Hark!"

"It was nothing," said Girdleberry.

"It sounded like Sir Rowland's voice. . . . It is his voice. How he must be shouting! Hark!"

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"No, I am not mad!" the far-off voice of Sir Rowland proclaimed.
"I can see it all now."

"The more violent he is the better," said Joshua Sharp, chuckling. "He can be as natural as he likes now, since he has been a *poseur* so long. Nobody will credit his sincerity: it will look like such very bad acting!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SHARP PRACTICE.

HORACE and Mabel entered the house from the garden, arm-in-arm. His face wore a curious exalted expression, but she was white and wan.

“No one here,” said he, seating himself upon the sofa and drawing Mabel down beside him. She inclined her shoulder toward his. “I wonder how long this beautiful mistake is to continue?”

“Oh, only for about another half-hour, I expect,” said Mabel wearily.

Horace meditated glumly.

“I don’t half like it, dear,” he said at last. “I’m so afraid the poor old

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guv'nor may burst a blood-vessel. Didn't you hear him shouting? I knew he would take it noisily—that's how he takes everything. It is confoundedly rough on him." He hesitated. "I'll go and put a stop to it at once," he said, suddenly rising.

He said this with no intention of fulfilling his threat, but because he wanted to drag new, sweet entreaties from Mabel. He was athirst for her further self-revelation. But now she did not entreat him. She remained upon the sofa, quite still, as if she were tired out.

"If you do I'll never speak to you again," she said.

"Oh, come," said Horace, somewhat disappointed. "It was all very well as a joke; but a long-drawn-out joke is the acme of boredom, and I must confess I am getting

rather tired of this very attenuated jest."

"Mr. Sharp must have time to get away," said Mabel dully. "Think of poor Phœbe!"

Horace seemed not to hear.

"What a magnificent rascal he is!" he cried. "'Pon my soul, this last sally of his genius trenches on the sublime!"

"Horrid, wicked old man!" exclaimed Mabel.

"Regarded as a piece of art," said Horace, who was nothing if not artificial and not much then, "his device was perfect—without blemish, superb! So sublimely audacious! He is such an apt sinner! And I had thought that apt sinning was a lost art!"

"Hitherto we have been as one—in art and heart, in mind, in sympathy," said Mabel earnestly. "But

I cannot share your admiration for Mr. Sharp, and I will not believe that it is sincere."

"To be sincere is to be dull," cried Horace. "Think how sincere a pig is!"

Mabel waved his words aside.

"It is terrible to think that that infamous man is poor Phœbe's father," she said. "My heart aches for her. And she will be going away—alone—without me to look after her——"

Here Mabel broke down utterly and sobbed out her sorrow on the unsympathetic arm of the sofa. Horace cast aside all his airy gaiety of demeanour in an instant. He bent over her with a face full of trouble, and touched her hair gently with his fingers.

"For God's sake, Mabel, don't do that," he cried hoarsely. "Don't—

don't. There's nothing in the world worth it."

He sank upon his knees and clasped his arms about her waist and drew her to him, and kissed her on her mouth. She yielded herself to him, half shrinking. But presently she withdrew herself gently from his embrace, and looked up at him with overflowing eyes, half smiling. Her lips fluttered ; the roguish dimples came and went in her cheeks.

"But—but, Horace," she said timidly, "how—how about 'the Higher Plane.' "

He answered at once :

"Oh . . . the Higher Plane!"

And he took her in his arms again.

There was a noise of angry voices on the other side of the door. Horace and Mabel started apart, conscience stricken.

"Oh, here comes poor Sir Rowland," cried Mabel. "What shall we do? Horace, what shall we do?"

Horace shook his head in stark dismay.

"I don't know," he said. "Poor old guv'nor!"

"I daren't face him," said Mabel.

"Nor I. Yet I hate to run away; still, there seems nothing else to do. Perhaps, after all, we had better get out of it.

He followed Mabel to the door, but laggingly, hampered by the brake of a lively conscience. Ere he could get away Buttle sauntered into the room, smoking a cigar. Behind him came Sir Rowland, writhing in the stern clutches of Cowrie and Mears. The baronet's face was purple with passion, his hair was rumpled, all the dignity was gone out of him.

“ Horace, Horace !” he shouted, as he caught sight of his son. “ Come here, you young scoundrel !”

Horace hesitated for an instant, then fled precipitately into the garden.

“ Do you hear me ?” cried the frenzied Sir Rowland. “ Come here ! Come back !”

“ Not so much noise, prisoner,” said Buttle, sitting down and crossing his legs with a lordly air. “ This violence will only make it worse for you.”

Sir Rowland, spluttering and fuming, howled forth :

“ You damned, infernal idiot ! You —you——” His rage choked him. He gasped out : “ If it wasn’t for these handcuffs my violence would make it worse for you !”

Buttle drew forth his note-book with an air of great ostentation and

flourished it solemnly before Sir Rowland's face.

"This all goes down in writing, you know, Sharp, to be used as evidence against you," he said; "you'd much better keep quiet."

"Keep quiet! you dunderheaded jackass!" roared Sir Rowland. "I shall *not* keep quiet! I insist upon being set at liberty immediately."

"Go on insisting, if it amuses you," said Buttle.

"Where's my wife?" cried Sir Rowland. "Where's my son? Where's everybody? Where's that villain Sharp? Let me be confronted with him again."

"It won't do—it won't do," drawled Buttle compassionately. "Why don't you drop it? What's the use of exciting yourself like this?"

"I'm not in a mood to discuss the

utilitarian aspect of conduct with any one, sir," said Sir Rowland ; "least of all with a man of your feeble capacity."

"Why, I'm surprised at you, I am!" Buttle went on. "Here you pretend to be a barrownite ; and all the time you talk like a Billingsgate fishporter. Why don't you act more in character? Do you think a barrownite *could* use language like your'n? You don't seem to understand your part a bit, you don't. I could make a better barrownite than you out of a bundle o' wood!"

Sir Rowland shook his clenched fists at Buttle and struggled toward him. Cowrie and Mears seized him by the shoulders and bumped him down in a chair.

"That's better, that's better," said Buttle. "Now I shall take down

your description in case of any accidents."

He opened the note-book, nibbled his pencil, and began to write. He read aloud such parts of his description as he thought might be especially interesting to his prisoner.

"Number Sixteen. Joshua Sharp. Age dubious, say about fifty-five——"

"Fifty-one, sir!" interrupted Sir Rowland. "Haven't you any eyes?"

"Short, stoutish," continued Buttle imperturbably. "Rather bald—not to say thin on the thatch!" He grinned. "Appearance unprepossessing—expression of low cunning—violent in speech and manner—language very bad!"

"You impudent hound!" cried Sir Rowland. "I'll have you kicked out of the Force for this piece of gratuitous insolence!"

"Very good, sir," said Buttles.

A door opened and Sharp entered slowly. He threw up his hands in pained horror at the sight of Sir Rowland.

"What is he doing in this room?" he whispered aside to Buttles.

"He would come in here, sir, I don't know why. But we thought it best to humour him, as he's such a cantankerous old rascal!"

"Yes, yes," said Sharp. He turned to address Sir Rowland. "Oh, Mr. Sharp, Mr. Sharp!" he said sorrowfully, "how shocked I am to see you in this terrible position!"

"You're an infamous scoundrel, sir," roared Sir Rowland. "I do not wish to talk to you."

Joshua Sharp continued:

"I can forgive you, Sharp, because I pity you. It may be weak of me—

the world would say it is, but I care nothing for that ; the world calls so many things weak that to me seem merely good." He paused and licked his lips as one enjoying a memory of good food, well-cooked. Indeed, now that he had overcome his first fears, his quick appreciation of the humorous aspect of Sir Rowland's position filled him with a glow of exhilaration. " You have eaten at my table, Sharp," he said. " You have partaken of my hospitality. We have held sweet converse together. I trusted you. I almost loved you. I thought you were an honest man."

" Ah, Sir Rowland," said Buttle, addressing Sharp with a smile of mild superiority, " if only you knew as much of the world as I do you wouldn't take the honesty of any man for granted."

‘It is a knowledge I have no craving for,’ said Sharp.

Sir Rowland snarled, showing his teeth.

“That knowledge is very useful, though,” said Buttle.

“It may be so,” said Sharp, “it may be so. I *am* too trusting, perhaps. I have thought so sometimes. But it is better to trust and be deceived than to smother in its birth every generous impulse of the human heart.”

Sir Rowland turned to Cowrie and Mears.

“Hold me, hold me tight,” he implored them, “or you may have to arrest me on a real charge of murder.”

Then he lapsed into sullen silence.

“It is truly lamentable to see in these painful manifestations of

unbridled passion the awful effects of a vicious life," said Sharp. " Yet I will not, I cannot believe, Sharp, that you are indeed wholly bad. I can trace in these bloated features, distorted with mad, unreasoning rage, the soft lineaments of childhood, happy in its virgin innocence. I can picture you at your mother's knee, Sharp, in some happy peasant home, perchance, lisping out moral tales in one syllable of the good unimaginative boy who never told a lie or hopped the festive wag, but always saved his half-pennies and died an Alderman!"

" You are the concentrated essence of villainous hypocrisy, sir," said Sir Rowland.

" Ah, Sharp, Sharp!" sighed Joshua Sharp, " it is vain to conceal from me that the cankerworm of remorse is even now gnawing at your heart. I

can well believe that your moral ruin was accomplished—not in a day, not in a year ; that there were times when your better nature, buried deep beneath a load of crime, struggled faintly to overthrow the devil within you, and to win you back to honesty again !”

“ Ah you’re too good, sir,” said Buttle ; “ you don’t know the old thief !”

Sir Rowland Gwyn had listened to Joshua Sharp in silence, as if fascinated, in his own despite, by the rogue’s overwhelming audacity. Now he turned on Buttle, and the anger blazed out in his face again.

“ You fool ! you crass blockhead ! ” he cried. “ You almost deserve that the villain should escape. Are you blind ? Can’t you see ? Do I look like a criminal ? ”

“ Alas, yes ! ” answered Sharp quickly. “ Even I who was your friend—nay, who am still your friend ! —cannot but see the awful signs of moral decrepitude deeply graven in your face. When you were connected with the D.U.M. —— ”

“ This is too much ! ” gasped Sir Rowland.

“ Ah, you shrink—and no wonder ! ” cried Sharp. “ What a world of terrible memories those three little letters must conjure up before you ! What good has the money of those poor dupes ever done you ? None at all ! I am sure of it. Ah, Sharp, Sharp, why—*why* did you forego the simple Three Per Cents of virtue for the bubble dividends of crime ? ”

“ Hark ! What was that ? ” cried Buttle.

There was the distant sound of a

great commotion—a patter of flying feet and scurry of skirts. The shrill voice of Phœbe was heard crying out above the tumult. Joshua Sharp rushed to the door. Buttle followed him.

“No, no,” cried Sharp, pushing the detective back, “this may be only a ruse to draw you away whilst the prisoner escapes.”

“Go on,” cried Buttle.

He turned back anxiously and took up an imposing position beside Sir Rowland.

“No, you don’t,” he said.

Joshua Sharp left the room, closing the door behind him. Ahead, a passage stretched away to the far end of the house. Adown the passage came Lady Gwyn, with Phœbe clinging to her skirts.

“Let me go, child, let me go to

my poor husband!" screamed Lady Gwyn, striking furiously at Phœbe's hands.

"Oh, papa!" wailed Phœbe.

"Go back, go back!" cried Sharp.
"Go back, both of you."

"I shan't, I shan't," screamed Lady Gwyn. "I will know what has happened!"

She broke away at last and bore down upon Joshua Sharp. He only had time enough to cry out again to Phœbe, "Go back! go back!" when the good lady was upon him. She pushed him aside and sped onward. He followed her pell-mell. They broke into the room together,

"Rowland, my Rowland!" cried Lady Gwyn, thrusting Buttle aside with sufficient violence to send him staggering across the room. She fell on her knees at her husband's feet

and laid her head upon his breast.
“What is the meaning of all this?
What have you done? Why didn’t
you listen to me? I always told you
you would get into trouble.”

She wept miserably.

“There, there, my dear, don’t
upset yourself so,” said Sir Rowland.
“It will come out all right. It’s only
a stupid blunder of this ass here”—in-
dicating Buttle with a contemptuous
thumb—“this pig-headed detective
fellow!”

“Oh, I know you can’t be guilty
of anything dreadful,” sobbed Lady
Gwyn. “But you are so imprudent.”

Here Mr. Buttle interposed. His
conviction that Sir Rowland Gwyn
was really Joshua Sharp remained
unshaken by Lady Gwyn’s ingenu-
ous outcry. He believed that it was
all part of a plot to hoodwink him.

And he was glad to believe it because Lady Gwyn had knocked him aside so rudely, upsetting his dignity, making of him a derision before his inferiors. He was stung to the point of exasperated vindictiveness. He gripped Lady Gwyn by the arm.

"Come, get up," he said roughly. "Don't you try any of your fancy tricks on me, ma'am. I'm not to be taken in so easy. You'd better have stayed up in the room where you was took when you fainted." His anger cooled a little. "I don't want to be hard on you for the sake of old times, Martha," he went on; "but if you don't check this humbug you'll get into trouble too. Mind, I've warned you!"

Sharp had stood aside, transfixed with doubt. Seeing that Fortune

still declared for him, he now came forward.

"Don't be hard on her, Mr. Buttle," he said. "She is more sinned against than sinning. Remember, too, that she is a woman." He turned to Lady Gwyn, smiling kindly. "Come, come, Mrs. Sharp," he said, "don't give way."

She stared at him aghast.

"What! What did you say?" she whispered. Astonishment had taken away her voice. "What does this mean"—she turned to her husband—"Sir Rowland?"

"Alas, that you should descend to such feeble duplicity!" cried Sharp. "Why do you attempt to deceive this intelligent police-officer, whose duty is already painful enough? And yet"—he turned with a working face—"such loyal devotion to an

unworthy husband is not altogether unlovely. It touches me." He shaded his eyes with his hand.

" My dear," cried Sir Rowland wearily, " you don't understand the wretched complication. Explain to this—this idiot that *that* is Joshua Sharp, and that I am Sir Rowland Gwyn."

" Look here, drop it," cried Buttle angrily. " It ain't any good, Mrs. Sharp. The game's up, and your precious rascal of a husband's fairly copped at last."

Lady Gwyn cried, " Oh ! oh ! oh ! " and spun round in a frenzy. She turned to Joshua Sharp, who still stood with bowed, averted head. " Mr. Sharp, Mr. Sharp," she cried.

He did not move. It was the supreme test of his self-control. Lady Gwyn turned to her husband.

“ Sir Rowland ! ”

Immediately, Joshua Sharp wheeled about and said soothingly, as if she had appealed to him :

“ There, there, Mrs. Sharp, calm yourself. Let me take you back to your room.”

“ If you touch me, I’ll tear your eyes out, you wicked old villain ! ” cried Lady Gwyn.

“ Come, come, ma’am, we can’t have Sir Rowland insulted like this,” said Buttle sternly. “ If he’d had his way your precious husband would have got off altogether.”

“ Don’t upbraid her, Mr. Buttle,” said Sharp gently. “ Be merciful. *I* can forgive her, though I am grieved beyond measure at this terrible display of base ingratitude. But I have long ceased to expect gratitude from any one. Verily, virtue is its own reward ! ”

"Verily, it should be," said Sir Rowland. "Give me back my hundred pounds, you villain!" To this demand Joshua Sharp paid no heed, and rightly; it is the acme of bad taste to return a gift. "Do you hear me?" cried Sir Rowland loudly. "Give me back my hundred pounds." He waited, but there was no response. He turned to his wife. "My dear, we must be calm," he said with a great sigh, as if to be calm were to be miserable. "This mistake has got to be cleared up. First of all, we must get Horace here. I cannot understand what has become of him." He addressed Buttles: "Policeman," he said, "send some one for Mr. Gwyn."

"What do you want with Mr. Gwyn?" growled Buttles. "Why should he be bothered? I should

think you've given this family trouble enough already. Why don't you try and feel ashamed of yourself?"

At this juncture Mr. Girdleberry entered the room. Sir Rowland started, a gleam of hope lighted up his eye.

"Mr. Girdleberry, Mr. Girdleberry," he cried.

Girdleberry turned with his accustomed air of respectful deference.

"Yes, Mr. Sharp?" he said.

Sir Rowland Gwyn heaved convulsively in his chair. Words failed him. He lay back, panting.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR ROWLAND IS HUMOURED.

JOSHUA SHARP's face blanched at Sir Rowland Gwyn's mention of Horace. He seemed face to face with Nemesis at last. He drew Girdleberry hastily aside.

"Come into the garden for a moment," he whispered.

"But won't it look odd?" objected Girdleberry nervously.

Joshua Sharp turned to Mr. Buttle.

"You will excuse me a moment," he said sauvely, "I have something to discuss with my secretary—some business matters. If you should want me you will find me just outside. . . . Would you mind handing me my

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hat? Thank you. . . . These night dews—I am not so young as I was. . . . Come, Girdleberry."

"It's a satisfaction to me to know that you'll never see them again, Mr. Buttle," said Sir Rowland confidently.

"Phew!" cried Buttle.

Outside, Sharp and Girdleberry confronted one another.

"It's all over," said Sharp. "He wants to see Horace. We had better be off at once."

"There is no necessity," said Girdleberry. "The train doesn't go for another twenty minutes. Your departure would be sure to arouse immediate suspicion."

"But Horace——"

"I have seen him. It is all right. He will support you—for sentimental reasons connected with Miss West, I believe."

"Thank God!" cried Sharp thoughtlessly.

"Ah!"

"Is Phœbe ready yet?"

"I think so. But she hasn't come out of her room."

"Bustle her, bustle her," said Sharp. "And see that she takes her trinkets."

"Yes, sir," said Girdleberry. "That shall be attended to."

"I feel that I want to get away at once," said Sharp desperately. "Somehow, it doesn't seem possible to keep this up much longer. Every minute increases the danger, and the strain is killing me." He looked at his watch. "The train ought to be in the station very soon now. You've booked our seats?"

"Yes, sir; they won't start without

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you. I have the station-master's word for that."

"Did you pay for his word?"

"Of course."

"That's the best of corrupt institutions. And the luggage?"

"That's all right, sir. There isn't much left in the house except the furniture."

"Which isn't mine, fortunately."

"The station-master assures me there won't be another train for a week. He told me the repairs to the line would cost £5, which I gave him."

"That's right, Girdleberry. Well, by to-night we shall be clear away, I hope, and then—"

He snapped his fingers and dug Girdleberry in the ribs merrily.

"But I must go back," he said.
"You keep out of it, Girdleberry. I

can hardly trust myself ; I don't want to have the added anxiety of your every word on my mind as well."

He went back to the house and Girdleberry stole away through the gloom of the garden.

Sir Rowland was shouting :

"Send for Horace, send for Horace. Why in the name of all that's good isn't he here?"

Buttle, seeing Joshua Sharp enter, accosted him.

'Have you any objection, Sir Rowland ?'

"I?" cried Sharp. "Oh no ! Humour him, humour him."

Sir Rowland stared, dismayed. He reflected deeply and his face grew despondent.

'Go and see if you can find Mr. Gwyn," said Buttle to Mears.

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“ Yes, sir.”

Mears departed from the room.

“ Now, Sharp, we shall see,” said Sir Rowland triumphantly. “ That reminds me.” He turned to Lady Gwyn. “ My dear, I wish you’d put my eyeglass in for me,” he said plaintively. “ I can see nothing.”

Lady Gwyn started up at once.

“ My poor Rowland ! ” she cried.

She bent over him, fumbling with his eyeglass nervously.

“ Not inside, not inside,” exclaimed Sir Rowland testily. “ What the devil are you doing ? ”

Joshua Sharp came forward, with his head held aside, ingratiatingly.

“ Allow me, Mr. Sharp,” he murmured.

“ Don’t you come near me, sir,” said Sir Rowland grimly. “ Besides, I’m blinded now in earnest ! ” he

whined. "Take the thing away altogether, Martha."

"Take it away?"

"Yes, yes; smash it up. . . . Wipe my eye, somebody, wipe my eye!"

"Ah!" cried Sharp, "his better nature is struggling for the mastery. He weeps. Thank Heaven, he weeps!"

"Sharp," said Sir Rowland, through his set teeth, "as sure as I'm alive I'll punch your ugly head when I get these off. I'll—I'll smash you!"

"You can only hurt my body, so what does it matter?" said Sharp cheerfully. "You cannot touch my soul."

And Joshua Sharp threw up his hands and sighed. A silence fell upon them all. Mr. Buttle whistled the first few bars of "Wait till the clouds roll by, Jenny," but immediately

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checked himself and became preternaturally solemn. At last, Mears returned with Horace and Mabel.

Horace faltered doubtfully on the threshold of the room. Joshua Sharp glanced anxiously at the young man. Horace returned his look with one of scornful menace.

Buttle rose.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," he said.

"Not at all, not at all," said Horace huskily. "What is it?"

"Thank Heaven you're here at last, sir!" exclaimed Sir Rowland severely. "Where have you been all this time? You seem to regard this as a joke."

"A joke!" echoed Horace.

"Personally, I don't see it," said Sir Rowland. "My sense of humour may be at fault, perhaps—perhaps not."

"Life itself might prove a joke," said Horace absently, "if we could but see it. . . . No, that's rot," he added, under his breath.

"It's the quintessence of rot and I'm glad you have sense enough to know even so much," said Sir Rowland testily. "Come, come, sir; tell these fools who I am. Don't stand there, jabbering like a monkey with a nut."

Horace remained silent in obvious embarrassment. He could not bring himself to utter what he had determined on. He saw the face of Joshua Sharp grow grey as stone.

"Tut, tut!" cried Sir Rowland distressfully, as his nameless fear grew. "Why don't you speak up? You can talk fast enough when nobody wants you to—that's generally! Tell this man who I am!"

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Horace smiled and moistened his lips.

"I—I don't understand," he said, in a worn, hard voice. "What am I to tell them, *Mr. Sharp*? If you're innocent—and I hope you are—of course you'll be able to clear yourself. To tell you the truth, I'd rather be left out of the affair altogether."

Sir Rowland gasped and his head swung back. A twilight smile lit up his face.

"I'm asleep. I know I am now," he said. "I must be. It was that salmon."

Cowrie and Mears sniggered. Sir Rowland turned to Mabel.

"Miss West," he said, "I suppose you can't identify me, either."

Mabel covered her face.

"I'm Sharp, of course?" said Sir Rowland.

"Oh, poor old gentleman!" murmured Mabel, turning away.

But Lady Gwyn's ire was roused. She rose in the tremendous majesty of her wrath and raised her hand with a valedictory gesture.

"Very well, Horace!" she said. "If *this* is your sense of duty—very well! But I always knew you'd do something dreadful some day with your horrid ideas about bazaars and things."

"It doesn't matter," said Sir Rowland. "I shall wake up in the morning, my dear. It'll be funny then, perhaps."

Lady Gwyn put his words aside. For a moment she stood awing each alike by the great dignity of her demeanour. Suddenly she crouched down and made as if to spring at the shrinking Mabel.

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“ And as for you——” she cried.
Mabel screamed and hid behind
Horace.

“ Never mind, never mind, my
dear,” said Sir Rowland, whose
chivalrous instincts became slightly
stirred at sight of Mabel’s distress.

“ Mind, indeed ! ” echoed Lady
Gwyn, snorting.

“ I think if I was taken into the
garden I might wake up,” said Sir
Rowland mildly. “ Now that I know
I am asleep I don’t mind it so much.”

“ Oh, anything to oblige,” said
Buttle. “ Go on, Cowrie, take him
out. You go, too, Mears. Whatever
you do don’t let go of him. He
might—wake up ! ”

Sir Rowland paused at the door
and turned to his wife.

“ My dear,” he said, a shadow of
doubt clouding his brow, “ in case I

am not really asleep, let some one saddle a horse and go down to our house for my papers. Perhaps that will convince this thickheaded ass of my identity. I give it up. . . . I feel very cold," he whined. "I suppose the bedclothes must have slipped off me!"

Lady Gwyn came back into the room. Buttle moved toward her with a tragic stride and hissed in her ear :

"Martha!"

"I can't talk to you, Mr. Buttle," she said icily. "I'm going to see about that horse."

"You can't," said Buttle. "I won't allow it. How do I know it ain't some fake or other? No, you stop here."

She gave him a wavering glance and sat down.

"Well?" she said.

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He hesitated a moment ere speaking.

"Ah!" he said at last, "you made a terrible mistake, Martha, when you married that old rascal. Perhaps, for all you know, he may have half a dozen other wives besides you. I know if I'd done what he has I wouldn't stick long at a little matter of polygamy."

Lady Gwyn looked at him curiously.

"Are you doing this out of spite, Bob, or what?" she asked.

"Well, bless me!" said Buttle. "If you hadn't been such a good cook, Martha, I should be inclined to say you ought to ha' been a hactress. It's lucky they put me on this job. I tell you straight that when you come in here just now and sobbed and hung about him and called him

'Sir Rowland,' so natural, you took me in almost."

Joshua Sharp came forward.

"It is as beautiful as it is sad," he said, "and as sad as it is beautiful, to see the love of a trusting woman diverted to such sorry ends!"

"Ah, indeed!" murmured Buttle.

Lady Gwyn almost smiled.

"Oh, Bob, you are a fool!" she said. "Whatever made them make you a detective?"

For a moment a misgiving assailed the detective. What if, after all, he had made a mistake? He almost trembled. But immediately he rejected the suggestion as an outrage on his common sense.

"A man of Mr. Buttle's overwhelming intelligence was bound to rise in any walk of life," Joshua Sharp remarked.

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The detective felt soothed and exalted again to his proper elevation.

"Thank you, sir," he rejoined. "I think I've always done my little best, though I say it, perhaps, as didn't ought."

"Oh, you simpleton!" cried Lady Gwyn. "Can't you see he's only sneering at you?"

"Really, madam——" began Sharp.

"Don't you talk to me," she said fiercely. "Get out of my sight, you wretch, do!"

"What a shrew!" cried Sharp, pursing his lips. "Poor Mr. Sharp! What a fool he must have been to change a good cook for a bad wife! . . . But we are interrupting you, Mr. Buttle. You were going to tell us how you got promotion."

Buttle glanced toward Horace and

Mabel who stood together outside the talk.

"Perhaps Mr. Gwyn and the young lady would like to hear, too," he suggested. "It seems a pity to leave 'em out of it, don't it?"

"Certainly it does," said Sharp. "Horace—Miss West—Mr. Buttle is telling a story he would like you to hear."

"That's very interesting," said Horace. "Please proceed, Mr. Buttle."

"It was all along of a little theory o' mine," said Buttle, with a gratified smile. "My theory is: Trust your instinct and you can't go wrong. Why, what do you think our instincts was given to us for?"

"What, indeed!" cried Sharp.

"They was given us to use, of course," said Buttle triumphantly.

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“Of course, I know this theory wouldn’t do for everybody, mind you.”

“No, no.”

“Certainly not. But with me, it’s different. I’ve trained my instincts, I have. For instance, now, I can spot a criminal in a minute. There’s something in him I can’t miss: I see it as soon as I claps eyes on him.”

“What an uncomfortable characteristic!” murmured Horace, impelled to say something.

“Perhaps it is,” said Buttle doubtfully. “I ain’t going into the merits o’ that remark. I’m dealing with my little theory now. It was through that there theory I came to capture Sammy Briggs, the Birmingham smasher, and got my promotion.”

“The theory that comes off once

in practice has a disproportionate amount of success," said Horace.

"It's all very interesting, very interesting indeed!" cried Joshua Sharp. "What a terror you must be to evildoers, Mr. Buttle!"

"I fancy I do make 'em sit up a little," observed the detective.

Nevertheless he felt that his story had missed fire, somehow. He was inclined to attribute its failure to Horace, for some reason scarcely known to himself. But he said nothing. Silence is the mourning-suit that a great mind wears at the funeral of an aspiration.

Lady Gwyn roused herself from her abstraction to remark :

"Oh, Bob ! you fool !"

The remark strangely irritated him.

"I was a fool when I trusted you, Martha," he said bitterly. "But,

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thank Heaven! you was a fool too, and hadn't the sense to appreciate me!"

"Thank Heaven, indeed!" ejaculated Lady Gwyn.

"There, there," said Buttle testily, "I don't want no arguments with females. What does the female mind know about logic and so on? I ought to go and look after my prisoner. Duty's duty and must be done."

"And I must go and look after my poor husband," said Lady Gwyn.

They passed into the garden together.

Horace turned to Joshua Sharp. He was seething with restrained fury.

"It would give me great satisfaction to kick you, Sharp," he said. "I hope you clearly understand why

I'm playing your little game for you?"

Sharp shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"Your usual craving for the bizarre, Mr. Horace, I presume," he said sweetly.

"It is because we love poor Phœbe," interposed Mabel. "Oh, Mr. Sharp, do be good to her! You've got enough money now. Go away and try to live like an honest man."

Joshua Sharp was genuinely affected.

"You're a good little girl, Mabel," he said. "I—I beg your pardon for a lot of things. I suppose I—you—you wouldn't care to shake hands with me?"

There was an odd note of mingled humility and wistfulness in his voice.

In silence Mabel extended her hand to him.

CHAPTER XV.

PARADISE LOST.

MABEL gently withdrew her hand from Joshua Sharp's tremulous clasp.

"Now, Sharp, go," said Horace, pointing to the door.

Sharp looked at him as if he would have spoken; but, the young man turning away, he remained silent and walked slowly to the door. He went out with bowed head. Horace and Mabel did not speak when he had gone. Presently the door was re-opened from without and Joshua Sharp appeared again, leading by the hand his daughter Phœbe.

‘ Say good-bye to Mabel, Phœbe,’ said Joshua Sharp. “ Then we must start. I’ll wait for you in the library.”

He went out, closing the door softly. When the sound of his receding footsteps had died away Phœbe came forward. She was clad in a long, grey, travelling cloak ; her face gleamed white behind her thick veil. She raised the veil.

“ My dear old Mab ! ” she cried.

The girls embraced. Phœbe’s eyes grew moist and her pale lips quivered.

“ We mustn’t talk,” she whispered. “ Papa told me not to ask you anything. “ Oh, Mab, Mab ! what is it that has happened ? ”

At this essentially feminine conclusion to her speech Mabel smiled. She kissed Phœbe with a tenderness that was half maternal.

“ Poor little Phibs ! ” she murmured.

Phœbe gulped down a rising sob,
and said huskily :

“ I’ll let you know where we are,
Mab.”

“ I wish I was coming with you,”
said Mabel.

Phœbe’s gaze wandered to Horace,
who stood at the farther end of the
room, gazing moodily into the night.

“ You must come and see us when
you’re married,” she said, “ and stay
for months and months and months.
It doesn’t matter where we go, you
shall always have your little room,
just like the one here, and I definitely
promise to give into you henceforth
about the pillows ! ”

Mabel smiled.

“ And may I eat biscuits in bed ? ”
she asked.

“ There shall be nothing in your
room but biscuits and pillows,”

She ran to the door and cried out brokenly, "Coming, papa!" then she ran back again.

"Just another, Mab!" she murmured, kissing her. "And let me know what I'm to send you for your wedding-present."

"I still hanker for the ornate coal-scuttle."

"You shall have two. That will be one for Horace—to prevent quarrelling and strife."

"You won't forget the ivory handles, Phibs?"

"They shall simply *bristle* with ivory handles. . . . Once more, good-bye, dear old Mab!"

"Good-bye, Phibs!"

They kissed again, mingling their tears. At last Phœbe disengaged herself from Mabel's embrace and sped away, calling out as she ran :

“Coming, coming, papa!”

When the sound of her voice was hushed in the distance, Mabel dropped down on a chair, and covering her face with her hands wept unrestrainedly. Horace lumbered heavily toward her, oppressed by that mighty clumsiness which invariably afflicts men in the presence of a crying woman. He bent over her.

“Don’t do that, Mab,” he said.
“Give me a kiss. Come.”

She was shaken with new grief.

“Hush!” he whispered. “Those people are coming.”

He snatched one priceless kiss and they retreated hastily to a dim corner.

Sir Rowland and Lady Gwyn entered, still under the close espionage of the three detectives. Sir Rowland was droning drearily:

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"I can't wake up! I can't wake up!"

"That'll come, that'll come, sir," said Buttle in sprightly tones.

"I want none of your confounded cheerfulness, sir," said Sir Rowland.

He sank wearily into a chair, groaning miserably.

"My dear," he said to his wife, "one of my studs is slipping down my back. I never dreamt that before."

"My poor, dear Rowland," cried Lady Gwyn. "Let me fasten your collar."

He submitted dully to her ministrations. There was a brief silence.

Buttle suddenly awoke from reverie.

"I don't know whether to keep you here to-night," he said, "or take you to the hotel."

"I have said I will not be marched

through the village between two policemen, even in the dark," said Sir Rowland. "I am not yet lost to every instinct of decency. You must get a conveyance, or stun me, or kill me. I won't go else."

"What a cantankerous old beggar it is!" exclaimed Buttle. "Well, well, I'll go and speak to Sir Rowland about it. Perhaps he'll be kind enough to let you stop here till to-morrow. Though you don't deserve it."

He left the room, wagging his head. Sir Rowland stretched himself in his chair, remarking:

"It's cruel work going to school in your old age. I never thought to learn resignation at my time of life."

No one answered him. Cowrie and Mears were just sufficiently

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recovered from the effects of their early potations to feel overpoweringly sleepy. Mabel and Horace were at an open window, listening and watching.

Suddenly, there came from afar the harsh scream of a train-whistle. Mabel cried out shrilly, her eyes dancing :

“ They’re off! They’re safe ! ”

Horace advanced shamefacedly toward his father :

“ I’m awfully sorry, guv’nor,” he said. “ I beg your pardon. I hope you’ll forgive me.”

Sir Rowland surveyed him quizzically.

“ Eh ? ” he cried. “ Does this mean that I am waking up? Get me out of this, my boy, and I’ll forgive you anything.”

A great sound of pounding boots

and angry shouting was heard. Buttle burst into the room. He spun round in a frenzy, cursing and striking the air.

"I've been done!" he howled.
"He's gone. The house is gutted!"
He seized Horace by the sleeve.
"Where is Sir Rowland?" he cried.

Horace shook him off.

"Here is Sir Rowland!" he said, indicating his father.

"I won't believe it," blustered Buttle, almost weeping, so chagrined was he. "What! Then where's the other old chap?"

Horace dragged him to the window and pointed into the darkness. In the distance was a faint, dusky glow, and a feather of smoke, amber-tinted.

"See that, Buttle?" he said.

Buttle stared and nodded. The sweat was pouring down his face.

"Yes, yes," he whispered.

"That's a train, and Joshua Sharp is in it."

Buttle broke away and raged up and down the room.

"Stop it, stop that train at once," he shrieked. "Mears—Cowrie—somebody, stop it!"

"No," said Horace, shaking his head, "you can't stop it. It's hard enough to start them, it's impossible to stop them. Come, we've had enough of this tomfoolery. Take these things off my father."

"Not me! Blow'd if I do!" cried Buttle. "Some one's got to go back with me."

He ran into the garden and stared at the disappearing train as if fascinated.

Cowrie and Mears had forgotten their drowsiness. They looked at Sir Rowland and at one another.

"Better do as the young man says," said Mears.

"I suppose so," said Cowrie gloomily.

He unlocked the handcuffs and released Sir Rowland. The old gentleman moved his hands apart and rose, and stood, as if dazed, looking from face to face.

Buttle rushed back into the room.

"Cowrie—Mears!" he cried.
"What shall I do?"

"If I were you, Mr. Buttle," said Horace, "I should endeavour, in the future, to watch my instincts very carefully."

"I want none o' your advice," growled Buttle. "You watch yourself."

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“It is a curious fact of life,” observed Horace with a bland smile, “that good advice is the only sort that is given, and bad advice the only sort that is received !”

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